

Scribes and Pharisees

William Le Queux



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ffor out of olde felles ab men seith
Cometh al this newe coun fro yere to yere
And out of olde bokes in good seith
Cometh al this newe science that men here

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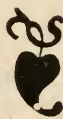
A Story of Literary London

BY

WILLIAM LE QUEUX

AUTHOR OF

'Whoso Findeth a Wife,' 'Zoraida,' 'The Great War
in England,' 'Devil's Dice,' 'A Madonna
of the Music Halls,' Etc.



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Amants, guerriers,
Durs justiciers,
Gros financiers :
 Paillasses !
Amour, fierté,
Gloire, équité
Et loyauté :
 Grimaces !

395753

TO
MY BROTHER 'VAGABONDS'
THOSE MERRY BOHEMIANS WHO WRITE AND PAINT
I INSCRIBE THIS STORY OF
LITERARY AND JOURNALISTIC LONDON
IN THE HOPE THAT THEY WILL FORGIVE ANY CRITICISM
AND NOT SEEK TO DISCOVER
THE ORIGINALS OF CERTAIN CHARACTERS
I HAVE HEREIN ATTEMPTED TO DRAW

VIALE REGINA MARGHERITA, LIVORNO

February, 1898

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Scribes and Pharisees



CHAPTER I

THE SIGN OF THE DEAD RAT

‘SHE’s a mystery.’

‘Well, at any rate, Teddy is infatuated — terribly infatuated.’

‘And he knows absolutely nothing of her — of her right name, of where she lives, or of who she really is. He says he does; but I know better, my dear fellow. I’ve got my suspicions.’

‘Suspicious of what?’

Bertram Rosmead, the indolent student, who had thus expressed doubt, smiled mysteriously. He had flung himself upon the frayed and faded couch at the open window of the airy, high-up old room on the Quai Montebello, and was lying with his hands lazily clasped behind his head and a *caporal* in his mouth, in an attitude of idle contentment. The rose and orange of the afterglow had faded. The roar of Paris came up from the streets below, and as he gazed dreamily across the placid river where beyond showed against the clear evening sky the twin time-worn towers of Notre Dame, the thin gilt spire of the Hôtel de Ville, and the ancient gothic tower of St. Jacques, he pondered deeply. The day was over; the Paris of Pleasure was lighting up, beginning its night of wild delight.

‘You’d better not express any such doubts in Teddy’s hearing. He’d be furious,’ observed Jean Potin, his fellow-student, who, together with the man they were discussing, shared equally that shabby room, half study, half studio, in which they sat. The place was silent and gloomy in the dusk, its three easels standing in line together, the lay-figure looking ghostly in the half-light, while the human skull perched on the top of the smoke-begrimed cupboard grinned grimly down upon them.

Rosmead laughed. He was about twenty-two, slim, dark-haired, dark-eyed, with features somewhat aquiline, square jaws denoting considerable determination, a refined, sensitive mouth, and brows well arched — a decidedly clever face, regular, expressive, and beaming with good humour.

‘Teddy’s an Irishman — all Irishmen are apt to be impetuous,’ he said, without removing his cigarette.

‘His impetuosity nearly brought him into trouble when he knocked down the gendarme outside the Chat Noir the other night,’ the young Frenchman laughed.

‘That *hirondelle de grève* owed Teddy a grudge ever since the night during the July fêtes when he kissed a girl on the Boulevard, and she complained of his conduct. There was a row, I believe, and the O’Donovan squared up to the elegant official, and would have chawed him up if the Marquis, Antoine, and some of the boys had not been present and succeeded in carrying him off by sheer force of numbers.’ Rosmead spoke French and used Parisian slang — the slang of the Quartier Latin — in a manner few Englishmen could.

‘I’ve noticed he’s been a little *triste* these last few days,’ the young Frenchman said, speaking with a strong Breton accent. ‘Teddy is not his usual self.’

‘The girl, my dear Jean — the girl,’ answered the carelessly-dressed Bohemian, with the air of a philosopher.

‘Poor old Teddy is in love. He hasn’t shouted “Hurrah for County Cork,” these ten days, and he never goes down to Mother Géry’s now. Where’s he gone this evening in such a devil of a hurry, I wonder?’

‘To meet her,’ his fellow-student said. ‘He meets her at eight every night in the little garden in the Rue du Cloître.’

‘At eight,’ Rosmead repeated reflectively. ‘Then, after all, she may be out of one of the *magasins*.’

‘From the Louvre, or Bon Marché, I’ve thought.’

‘No, I can’t believe that,’ said the young Englishman. ‘From her manner she’s evidently a lady.’

Jean raised his shoulders to his ears with expressive gesture, but uttered no word. He was thin-faced, rather tall and slim, of sallow complexion, and a trifle sad-looking, with a pair of deep-set, penetrating black eyes. His clothes were shabby, and paint-besmirched, and, like Rosmead, his fingers were stained yellow by the *caporals* he eternally consumed, while the black silk cravat knotted around his neck did dual duty as collar and tie. But in that gay, careless set to which they belonged a man was never judged by the cut of his coat, the glossiness of his hat, or the manner in which his cravat was tied. Theirs was a merry life, spells of spasmodic work at home or at Julien’s being invariably followed by wild outbursts of pleasure.

Bertram Rosmead, Jean Potin, and Teddy O’Donovan formed a trio of students as merry, as reckless, and as impecunious as any in the quaint old Quartier Latin. Through three whole years they had lived a life of feast one day and fast the next in that bare, ill-furnished sky-attic, sharing each other’s joys and sorrows, alternately idling and working, smoking their long rank cigars purchased in the ‘Boul. Mich.’ at five centimes apiece, and quenching their insatiable thirst with an exceedingly inexpensive wine possessed of a better colour than taste. Little

they knew and less they cared for the worries of life, existing as they did in Bohemia, their world apart.

In those days the old Quartier still existed, dirty, *bizarre*, and filled with men many of whose names have since become household words throughout Europe; men now distinguished in the worlds of art, literature, medicine, and diplomacy; men who, fifteen years ago, were glad enough to dine at Mother Géry's for half-a-franc, and even to eat a handful of roasted *marrons* on a winter's night to keep out the cold and stave off the pangs of hunger. Those were days of empty stomachs and full brains; of cheerful yesterdays and confident to-morrows, of wild practical joking, of shifts and debts, of good humour, of rollicking merriment and genuine good-fellowship.

The man who knew the beloved old Quartier in those well-remembered days, and now revisits it, will sigh to note everywhere a change. If he forsakes the present, leaves the busy Rue de Rivoli, crosses the Pont Neuf, and plunges for a brief hour into the past, he will soon discern that Bohemia no longer exists there. Its old-world charm has passed away, because it has become modernised, and has assumed a sorry air of mock gentility. Let him glance up at the four well-remembered top windows of that dingy-looking house on the Quai Montebello, the grey front of which faces the Seine, and he will actually discover lace curtains there! Alas! that the *grisette* died with Murger and Musset.

But in the days when that high-up room was tenanted by these three happy, indolent revellers the Quartier was still Bohemia, and of all those who used to dine so frugally at the little *crémérie* with the red blinds in the Rue Galande there was not one more popular among his fellows than Bertram Rosmead. As an artist he was sadly wanting in talent. Everybody knew it; he himself was too painfully

aware of it. But he was a born vagabond, a thorough-going Bohemian, who would lounge into the Grand Café in his threadbare clothes, collarless, with his rusty black cravat secured in a big bow, and order his refreshment with the air of a prince, and even go to the opera and rub shoulders with the daintiest Parisiennes in the same paint-bespattered jacket and with several days' growth of beard upon his chin. He spoke with all the *argot* of the seamy side of Paris life, and held in esteem and respect by his fellow-students, he was perfectly content, caring absolutely nothing for the opinion of the world. To the true Bohemian the Seine separated his own world from that outside, forming a distinct division between the *quartier* he loved and the *quartier* he held in contempt.

These three led a reckless life. In those idle days the quips of Droz convulsed them, the romances of Sue held them breathless, and the pathos of Murger caused lumps to rise in their throats. In those days time was counted by the dates of remittances from home, and at that period, in their youthful enthusiasm, they all of them believed their works would one day be hung in the Luxembourg for the admiration of the crowds of gaping tourists who daily flock there. They were indeed as light-hearted, cosmopolitan, and open-hearted a trio as ever trod the Pont Neuf or handled a stick in a student's scrimmage.

'If she's really a lady,' Jean observed, after a long pause, during which, perched on the high painting-stool, he pensively sketched in crayon an imaginary caricature of Teddy kissing his mysterious divinity, 'if she really is a lady,' he repeated with emphasis, holding his head on one side as he contemplated his sketch, 'it's certainly strange that she should have taken up with the O'Donovan. All along he's said he hated women.'

'Yes, it is strange,' acquiesced Rosmead. 'I always

thought that he was proof against love-looks.' Then, reflecting upon one or two of his own minor affairs of the heart, he added, with a sigh, 'All of us have our spells of foolishness now and then, I suppose.'

'Ah! you speak from experience. Have you seen Fosca lately?'

'Fosca? What do you mean?' the young Englishman asked, raising his eyebrows with well-feigned astonishment.

'Fosca has fascinated you, my dear Bertie,' his friend said, with a tantalising laugh. 'You can't deny it — come.'

Rosmead smiled.

'I suppose it's useless,' he laughed. 'I didn't think you'd notice it. Do any of the other fellows know?'

'Everybody knows,' was Jean's prompt reply. 'When a man as popular at Julien's as Bertram Rosmead falls in love, the Quartier very soon knows all about it.'

'But I'm not *avec un jaune d'œuf*,' Rosmead protested, involuntarily dropping into slang. 'I think it's devilish hard on a fellow to spread such unfounded reports. When I bought a new hat — two years ago now — everybody knew about it within half an hour, and the word went forth that I'd joined the *gommeaux*. And with what result? That hat was not on my head an hour before two fellows came along, snatched it off, and pitched it into the Seine; while a dozen other of the boys stood laughing at me as I watched it bobbing merrily away beneath the bridge. I haven't bought a silk hat since, and I shall never have another. It's too respectable.'

'But what about La Fosca?' Jean demanded. 'Did you see her when you were out this morning?'

'No; but I met the Marquis.'

'And he wanted to borrow, I suppose?'

'I lent him the usual thirty centimes,' responded the man on the couch, stretching himself and yawning. 'Poor

Marquis! he's always absolutely stony — *brouillé avec le directeur de la Monnaie,*' and he laughed.

'Yes, but with him borrowing has become an involuntary act,' Jean exclaimed quickly. 'A fortnight ago, when my last remittance came, he took me into a corner and confided to me that he hadn't a sou in his pocket, and wanted five francs to buy some nourishment for his ailing wife. I lent him it — five single francs. Ten minutes later, when we were parting, he took me to have a drink in at Chauvel's, and he actually had the impudent audacity to pay for it with a ten-franc piece!'

'Rough on you, old fellow,' Rosmead laughed. 'He's reduced borrowing to a fine art. I believe he's had loans from the fellows sufficient by this time to pay off the mortgage on his *château.*'

'His *château* in Spain?' observed Jean, smiling.

Rosmead made no reply. Giuseppe Farini, the grey-bearded old Italian who sat as model for the head of St. Peter, was a well-known figure in Bohemia. Where he lived nobody knew. He was of that type which the lower class Parisian would term a *galapiat*. He existed chiefly on charity and by loans extracted from artists to whom he had sat, and was inclined to frequent the lowest wine-shops whenever the generosity of his friends allowed him to dissipate. For many years he had lived in the Quartier, and his handsome furrowed face had been perpetuated many and many a time by men who had since made their mark, and whose portraits of him now hung in various galleries in Europe. Like those who employed him, or gave him alms, Giuseppe was a Bohemian, although given to boasting when in his cups. Legend had it that once, long ago, he had staggered into Mother Géry's, and having created a disturbance, was ordered by a man, now a member of the Academy, to leave the place. Whereupon the model with

the apostolic face struck an attitude, and announced that in his own country he was a marquis, the holder of a title as ancient as Notre Dame itself. From that moment the students bestowed upon him the title of 'the Marquis,' and as such he was ever afterwards known. His daughter Fosca, too, was a familiar figure, universally admired by the students, for she was a handsome girl with black eyes and features of the true Tuscan type, who was engaged as assistant in the lace department of the Grand Magasins de Louvre, the great building in the Rue de Rivoli, the tricolour on the roof of which Rosmead could plainly see from where he had lazily stretched himself.

Jean had spoken the truth—he loved Fosca. In the Quartier, where there were dozens of other men who had endeavoured in vain to win smiles from her, he alone had been able to induce her to take walks with him, to extract from her an acknowledgment of love. They did not meet often, for the hours at the Louvre were long, and the female assistants were not allowed to roam the Paris streets at night, as those of similar establishments in London. Sometimes he would cross the Pont d'Arcole and enter the gigantic *magasin* where all Paris shopped, and, making his way among mazes of counters presided over by neatly-dressed girls in black, would pause at that devoted to the sale of Valenciennes, Maltese, Spanish, and Torchon, and under the pretence of making a purchase would make an appointment. But the keen eye of the head saleswoman was always upon them, therefore on such occasions their conversation was always brief and to the point, and only on Sunday evenings under the trees in the Tuileries Gardens or in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, could he press her hand and pour forth his declarations of fervent devotion. The Marquis had, however, quickly discovered the attachment, and with an instinct of thrift had at once made

it a source of income. Many were the thirty-centime loans he obtained from the easy-going, improvident student, because the latter could not refuse a favour to Fosca's father.

Bertram Rosmead was as light in pocket as in heart. The son of a struggling London barrister who had died ten years before, the cost of his education had been defrayed by a wealthy and somewhat eccentric uncle, who had subsequently allowed him to choose a profession, and he had chosen that of artist. The allowance the old man made him in order that he might study at Julien's was not large; indeed, it only just sufficed to keep body and soul together; but on completion of his studies he knew that this must cease, therefore, although convinced that he had but little artistic talent, he hesitated to confess the appalling fact to his uncle. When he had first come to Paris he was eager, enthusiastic, and fired with ambition; but soon, like every other student, the easy, lazy life sapped his energies until he found himself caring nothing whatever about art, preferring to spend the summer days in idleness, reading the cheap romances purchased from the stalls along the quays. He was no longer ambitious, born Bohemian that he was. So long as he had a franc or two to jingle in his pocket, the society of Jean and Teddy, and Fosca's eyes with their genuine love-light shining upon him, he wanted nothing else, and was careless of all the world beside.

He glanced from the open window back into the gloomy room. On the three easels were canvases nearly finished, two of them being very mediocre productions, while the third, a head of Bacchus, showed talent of no mean order. The fact was that neither Rosmead nor his companion were brilliant; the absent Irishman alone possessed genius.

Jean, having finished his cigarette and tossed the end out of the window, descended from his perch to obtain another, and as he did so, remarked:

‘Teddy is going to bring Mademoiselle up here to-night.’

‘Teddy going to bring her here?’ echoed Rosmead, incredulously, raising himself upon his elbow and looking towards his fellow-student. ‘He said nothing to me about it.’

‘He told me in confidence,’ the young Frenchman explained. ‘He said he shouldn’t tell you, because he believed you didn’t like her.’

‘He guessed aright. I don’t like her,’ the other answered promptly.

‘You seem to entertain some rather absurd prejudice,’ Jean observed, standing in the half-light with both hands thrust deep in his trousers’ pockets. ‘Why?’

‘I’m afraid Teddy will make a fool of himself over her. He’s never loved before, and he’s capable of any mad folly.’

‘But she’s charming, and she speaks English,’ observed the young Breton. ‘When we met them in the Rue Castiglione the other day I thought her extremely pretty.’

‘Yes, pretty, and that’s all,’ growled Rosmead, with unusual asperity. ‘He’s becoming a dandy. He brushes his clothes every day now, and rubs his hands with pumice-stone to get the colours out of them. And all through her.’

‘You’ve taken a violent dislike to her.’

‘Yes, I have,’ Bertram Rosmead admitted. ‘Teddy’s one of us, and I’m hanged if I’ll stand by and see him imposed upon by a worthless, good-for-nothing hussy who won’t even give her name or address — an adventuress, or a woman who frequents the Rat Mort, for aught we know.’

‘But you’ve just expressed the opinion that she’s a lady,’ Potin protested.

‘And don’t ladies go there? Don’t some of the most wealthy and notable women in Paris put on their maids’ dresses and go there to dine at those two long tables off

plates ornamented by dead rats? Have not you and I witnessed it with our own eyes?’

The Breton nodded.

‘And you believe that of her?’ he asked, after a moment’s pause.

‘Yes,’ Rosmead answered, ‘I do.’

Potin looked at him for a few seconds mysteriously.

‘A modern Sappho — a *belle-petite*?’ he observed inquiringly.

‘Exactly.’

‘Then if such is really the case,’ Potin said, ‘I can well understand your indignation that your compatriot should have fallen in love with her. Such women are worse than the lowest daughter of the pavement.’

And both smoked on in silence, while the great bell of Notre Dame slowly boomed forth the hour. Then, as Potin went out to get his dinner at Mother Géry’s, Rosmead, gay and light-hearted as always, sighed, raised himself into a sitting posture, and beating time with his cigarette-stained finger, commenced to sing in a fair tenor voice the waltz refrain of that old song so popular in the Quartier :

Mimi, Musette,
Ninon, Suzette,
Las ! qui n’implore
Votre retour
Comme une aurore
D’amour !

Car vous aviez la fantaisie
Qui manque à la stupide fin
De ce siècle de bourgeoisie ;
Car vous étiez la poésie
Des pays bohème et latin.

CHAPTER II

BEHIND NOTRE DAME

WHILE Rosmead and the young Breton were thus discussing Teddy O'Donovan's love affair, the man whose infatuation had awakened such severe criticism was lounging in Father Gros's little wine-shop in the Rue St. Séverin, a low-ceilinged, smoke-begrimed place much frequented by students, its specialty being the wine at four sous. At one of the little tables sat the big, round-faced, fair-haired, merry Irishman known to all in the Quartier as 'The Bouchon,' the French equivalent for Cork. The nicknames in Bohemia were frequently derived from the native town of the student, and in this instance, as Teddy was eternally referring to the city in the south of Ireland whence he hailed, some wit or other at once translated it into French, and ever afterwards he bore the appellation.

As he sat with his worn-out, baggy-kneed trousers turned up over cracked boots, a coat which had once been dark blue, but was now rapidly assuming a shade of stone grey, a soft, round felt hat stuck on the back of his head, a handkerchief knotted around his throat, and a long, thin, and terribly rank cigar between his teeth, he looked the very picture of laziness and carelessness. At Julien's he had already been singled out as a coming man. That he could paint well, and was an adept at foreshortening the figure, was acknowledged everywhere, and even Glénat,

the great critic of the *Figaro*, who had seen some of his work, had bestowed upon it a word of commendation. Praise from Glénat was praise indeed, as every artist in Paris knows.

Many men after this would have given themselves airs; but not so with Teddy. He was essentially an idler, essentially a merry, good-hearted, open-handed Bohemian. His friends were wealthy; he belonged to one of the county families in Ireland, and his father had represented Galway in the House for ten years. He, however, preferred life in the Quartier to that in an English cavalry regiment, for which he had originally been intended, and having taken up art as a profession, no one was more surprised than himself at his own success. Wild and reckless, he was regarded as a leader in any pranks which the students played upon the representatives of law and order, for his burly form and great physical strength placed him far above his puny fellow-students, and in a street scrimmage his 'Hurrah for County Cork!' was as a well-known war-cry.

Many times he had been within an ace of arrest. Of the many droll stories told of his resourcefulness, one was how one night, after climbing a street lamp and lighting his long Virginia, first breaking the glass, he slipped down to the pavement, and there found a policeman awaiting him. In an instant he rushed away, and was hotly pursued. His long legs, however, soon outdistanced his pursuer, when suddenly he dashed into a doorway, entered the *concierge's* little den, flung aside his hat, and assuming the peaked and greasy headgear of the absent porter, sank into a chair. When the policeman entered he was poring over the *Soir* in the dimly-lit little room. 'Did you see a student enter a moment ago?' demanded the breathless policeman. 'Yes,' answered the O'Donovan gruffly, 'Pierre Manuel, fourth

floor, just gone up.' The officer dashed upstairs two steps at a time, while Teddy, picking up his hat, resumed it, and calmly walked home.

Opposite him, at the little table that evening in Father Gros's, sat the old grey-bearded, furrow-faced Italian known as the Marquis. The latter had extracted the usual loan of thirty centimes, and was now consuming a *mominette* at the lender's expense. His thin, bony hands, every line of which all students at Julien's knew, so often had they sketched them, shook nervously as he deftly manufactured a fresh cigarette from the screw of tobacco he had taken from his pocket, and his face had relaxed into a smile owing to some observation of the witty Irishman. His hair and beard remained untrimmed, for professional purposes; his deep-sunken eyes had a wonderful pious expression, even when he was too intoxicated to stagger to his unknown home; he smelt eternally of garlic, and his clothes were so antique and greasy as to be almost too unwholesome even for Bohemia.

And this was the father of the pretty Fosca, the slim-waisted little shop assistant over in the Rue de Rivoli, whose dainty figure and smiling face were so familiar to every student in the Quartier.

His applications for loans of thirty centimes had apparently been successful that day, for as he sat there he was in a maudlin, half-intoxicated condition.

'I tell you there's no art in Paris nowadays,' he was saying emphatically to Teddy, bending forward unevenly after lighting his cigarette. 'Look at all the duffers in this year's Salon — Lapaine, Ondet, Trombert, Lepelletier, Laurens, and all that crowd. Not one of them can paint a good picture. All this impressionist craze is ruining art; yet the critics are fostering it, well knowing that in five years the vogue will have gone by.'

There was a good deal of truth in the old Italian's words, and Teddy inclined his head in acquiescence.

'Look at Ondet's "Queen of the Night," about which there's such a confounded fuss! The thing's perfectly absurd, both in colouring and treatment. The head's out of drawing,' the old man continued.

'No, no,' protested Teddy, 'a bad picture certainly, but not quite so bad as all that, Marquis. They've bought it for the Luxembourg, at any rate, and Ondet has arrived.'

'I know he has,' growled the Italian. 'And only a year ago Glénat, when he saw a head he did from my model, told him to go back to Blois and grow roses — his father's a florist who supplies the Madeleine.'

'He'll paint them now, instead, and find it more profitable than raking manure,' Teddy laughed.

'Yes, yes,' said the Marquis, impatiently, 'but alas! how art is degenerating nowadays! *Dieu!* half the men in this year's Salon wouldn't have been allowed to enter any of the schools fifteen or twenty years ago. These modern men can design advertisement posters, or draw in black and white for the so-called comic journals, but it's a sheer waste of good material to allow them to spoil canvases. Three-quarters of the men at present at Julien's would earn more at selling tape than in attempting to produce the miserable sketches they call pictures. For example, there's your friend and countryman Rosmead. He'll never become an artist; he ——'

'He's well aware of that,' Teddy snapped, quickly interrupting. The Marquis was on dangerous ground, for to utter a word detrimental to either of his two friends was to the O'Donovan like the holding up of a red rag to a bull. His quick Irish blood rose in a moment.

'Then why the devil doesn't he leave Paris?'

'Because he has an attraction here in the person of your

daughter Fosca,' answered Teddy, mischievously, well knowing that any mention of the attachment displeased him. The Marquis had set his mind upon his daughter marrying a man of means, and not a wild, penniless student.

'*Père la Tuile!*' Farini exclaimed, with an angry gesture, using students' *argot*. 'The girl's an idiot. I've told her so over and over again. With her face she can marry a man who can afford to keep her properly. She's not the kind of wife for Rosmead.'

'What have you to say against him?' inquired Teddy, eyeing the Marquis with severity. 'He's in a chronic state of hard-up; but isn't that the state of all of us? Surely things have not so degenerated that here, in the Quartier, poverty is to be flung into a man's face? If so, then the first man to suffer is yourself, my dear Marquis.'

The Italian, thus snubbed, mumbled some vague, indistinct explanation, but his shifty eyes told the young Irishman that his companion was scarcely aware of what he was saying, therefore, pleading an urgent appointment, he rose, and having paid the rough-headed, unkempt waiter, strolled airily out, shouting a merry farewell to his noisy fellow-students seated in little groups around.

'The poor old threepenny Marquis is becoming an impossible person,' Teddy exclaimed aloud in his rich Irish brogue, as he crossed the Place St. Michel towards the bridge. 'The idea of criticising Bertie's work! It's too bad. Nobody does that, because its defects are so painfully plain. There's one blessing, the merry Rosmead is fully aware that he'd earn more at painting shop-fronts than at painting pictures, and he certainly hasn't turned amateur critic, like most other failures. I'll be hanged, however, before Bertie shall be poked fun at, even by the Apostle.'

On the bridge he paused to light a fresh cigar, and as he did so the cathedral clock struck eight.

‘Still a quarter of a hour before meeting Violette,’ he said, and leaning upon the iron balustrade, he gazed into the dark, swirling waters of the Seine. The dusk was fast deepening into night, and from where he stood the Île de la Cité and the quays were already ablaze with lights. ‘Strange,’ he murmured aloud. ‘Very strange that Violette is so mysterious, and will tell me absolutely nothing. Whence she comes, or whither she goes, I know not. We meet over in the little garden there, behind Notre Dame, for one brief hour each evening; yet I know nothing of her — absolutely nothing.’

Teddy’s acquaintance with his divinity was certainly a romantic one. Two months before, while taking a walk one evening along the exterior boulevards, he saw her being molested by a ruffianly-looking beggar, and he, having warned the fellow off, walked beside her and commenced to chat. She thanked him with sweet dignity, and apparently not averse to his company, he succeeded in extracting from her a promise to meet him again. She kept the appointment, and from that evening they had become close friends. Who or what she was had remained a mystery. She was very handsome, fair, and aquiline of feature, with haughty, almond-shaped eyes of a curious light blue, very arching dark brows, and a mouth like a full crimson rose. Not quite Teddy’s ideal, to be sure; but then he had only seen his ideal in his dreams.

So fascinated had he been on the first night he had met her that he was not absolutely certain what she was really like, except that there was a vestal lily-whiteness about her, and that she had pure, shy eyes and a face framed by a mystical halo of red-brown hair. But when they met the next evening in the quiet little garden between the grey old cathedral and the Morgue, he was not disappointed. There, in the fading sunlight, he saw she was undeniably beautiful.

As they sat together on the seat beneath the crumbling wall of Notre Dame, he told her of himself, that he was an art student, one of a luckless, careless crowd, and pointed across the river to the dingy old house which was his abode. On her part, however, she vouchsafed no confidences. She was affable, pleasant, light-hearted, and laughed merrily at his witticisms; but beyond telling him that her name was Violette she would reveal nothing as to her identity. She was evidently a girl of strong character, and by her independence was no doubt used to going about alone. Sometimes he inclined to the belief that she was a music-teacher or governess, because of her knowledge of subjects of which most women are ignorant; but one evening he had noticed on her wrist a bracelet of fine diamonds, and reflected that such a costly ornament could scarcely be possessed by one who earned her living by tuition. In manner and in speech she was refined; she was always dressed quietly, but her gowns betrayed the cut and fit of the fashionable dressmaker, and she had all the dignity and bearing of a lady.

Yet the mystery surrounding her was certainly curious. It puzzled, perplexed, and tantalised him.

As his eyes fixed themselves upon the whirling flood rushing away beneath the bridge, he pondered, as he had pondered many times during those past two months. He, gay, happy, irresponsible, and irrepressible, loved her. That she was a lady he felt confident, although her determination to conceal her identity was remarkable, even suspicious.

Many times when he had walked at her side along the quays he had tried by ingenious devices to ascertain something of her past, but she studiously avoided all reference to it. She spoke with a polished Parisian accent, and was dainty and *chic* from her pretty hat, which suited her so admirably, to the point of her high-heeled many-buttoned boots. There was nothing loud or coquettish in her dress,

no inharmonious colours; in everything she exhibited that taste and refinement which is the very essence of good breeding.

A few evenings before, when he had been speaking of his own life, of his struggles and ambitions, she had turned to him, and said quietly :

‘I know. I had been told all about you before we met.’

‘Who told you?’ he inquired in quick surprise. ‘Who is our mutual friend?’

‘No,’ she answered, smiling. ‘The identity of my informant is a secret. I heard of your success at the painting-school, of your happy *ménage*, and of the love affair of your English compatriot.’

‘You mean Bertram Rosmead,’ he answered. ‘He admires Fosca Farini, a pretty, black-eyed Italian girl, who’s employed at the Louvre. He’s a good fellow, Rosmead — the very best of good fellows.’

She did not reply, but had he been watching her face narrowly, he would have noticed that a strangely supercilious expression played about her lips.

‘You will remember we met him with Jean Potin in the Rue Castiglione the other day?’ Teddy went on.

‘Ah, yes,’ she said mechanically, ‘I recollect,’ and she allowed the subject to drop without further comment. She was not enthusiastic over his fellow-students, and he attributed it to her natural dignity. She, the daughter of a wealthy house, had no doubt been taught from childhood to look down upon those who were careless in dress, and whose habits were loose. She was a patrician, while he was a Bohemian. Yet he loved her with all the full force of his passion. Towards him she was sweet and tender, allowing her tiny, well-gloved hand to rest in his, even though their lips had never once met.

On one occasion, when sitting together beneath the trees on the Quai d'Orsay, he had seriously imperilled his position in her good graces by placing his arm around her slim waist and bending towards her, but with a dexterous movement she had slipped from his embrace and held up her hand in expressive silence, with a look of annoyance upon her fair face. Thus it was that, although he adored her, no declaration of love had yet passed his lips.

To-night, as he stood watching the dark current shimmering in the lamplight, he made a firm resolve to tell her the truth. No longer could he bear the suspense which for the past two months had been daily torturing him; no longer could he endure this tantalising mystery which surrounded his well-beloved. His every thought in his waking hours was of her, of who and what she was, of her beauty, of her present life, and of her past. What was it, he wondered, that she hid so carefully from his knowledge? If they became lovers, then no doubt she would be induced to confess to him. It was the only way. Yes, he would tell her plainly and honestly that night that he loved her, and would afterwards take her over to the Quai Montebello and show her his abode.

At that instant somebody clapped him heartily on the back, and a cheery voice cried in French:

‘Contemplating making a splash, Bouchon, eh? We’ll all come and have a look at you when you’re in the Morgue. Hurrah for County Cork!’

The Bouchon turned quickly, and realised that the grim humour proceeded from one of his reckless companions, who, walking arm-in-arm with half-a-dozen others, was evidently going forth into the Grand Boulevards for an evening’s diversion.

Teddy laughed, and with his quick Irish wit shouted after them:

‘See that they ticket me sixty-nine; it’s my lucky number.’

Thus aroused from his meditations, he strolled on across the bridge light and airily, laughing gaily to himself, his hands stuck in the pockets of his shabby jacket, his long cigar still in his mouth, his hat set a trifle rakishly on his head, for was he not going to keep the appointment with Violette? Was he not about to tell her plainly how well he loved her?

He still had plenty of time, for she was usually ten minutes or so late in keeping her appointments, and nearly always came in an open cab, springing out in breathless haste, laughing merrily, and apologising for keeping him waiting. When she left him she always took a conveyance, giving the driver the same address each time, namely, the Place de l’Opéra, in order that he should not follow and see whither she went. Once or twice he had been sorely tempted to take another cab and drive after her, but she had once asked him not to endeavour to follow her, and he had given his promise. His dress, he thought, was not such as might commend itself to her friends, and, loving her as devoutly as he did, he had perfect confidence in her. She had a reason, no doubt, in all this caprice — a reason which would be made plain some day.

As he turned from the Boulevard du Palais, sauntering slowly along the quay, he encountered his friend Dechaume, a long-haired, pallid young man, whose mission in life was to write lyrics for the lower music halls of the exterior boulevards, and who was a notable personage at the now-defunct Chat Noir. They stood for some ten minutes gossiping, then he strode on again. The quarter boomed forth before he reached the foot of the Petit Pont, and he had still a good five minutes’ walk before him. Therefore, knowing that he must be late, he hurried forward at a good

pace, crossing the wide Place before the dark, gloomy façade of Notre Dame, and proceeding up the narrow, dingy Rue du Cloître which skirts the cathedral, he at length entered the little railed-in garden lying immediately behind the historic old pile. In the daytime this leafy enclosure is alive with children, the children of morbid-minded persons who delight in the inspection of the bodies behind those dingy glass cases in the Morgue, and who leave their progeny to play while they feast their eyes upon the ghastly dead in the long low building opposite. In the evening, however, the garden is quiet, peaceful, and deserted.

Night had fallen now, a hot and breathless night after the stifling August day, and as he entered the enclosure, walking with swinging gait along the asphalt path beneath the trees, the statuary looked ghostly and mysterious in the deep shadow. But airily he strode along, humming to himself a popular march, and eager to meet her, until turning at last to a path at right angles, he came suddenly within sight of the low stone seat against the cathedral wall which was their nightly trysting-place.

Yes, she was already awaiting him. He could discern her well-known figure in the dim light cast by the lamps of the cabs on the rank beyond the railings, and he hastened towards her with a glad greeting on his lips.

She was sitting at the further end of the seat, her head sunk as if in deep meditation, so deep, indeed, that even his voice did not arouse her.

‘Violette!’ he cried, ‘forgive me for keeping you waiting so long. It shall not occur again. Forgive me.’

But she answered not.

Surely he could not be mistaken. He took her gloved hand in frantic eagerness, and bent towards her, glancing into her countenance. Her eyes, wide open, were fixed

and staring, her face was blanched to the lips, her white glove was wet and sticky.

He raised her hand close to his gaze, then stood speechless in terror. There was a dark, ugly stain upon it — the stain of blood.

‘Good God!’ he shrieked in wild alarm. ‘Violette! Speak to me, Violette!’

Her head fell back inert and helpless upon his arm, and as he peered into her wild, glaring eyes, they slowly assumed a look of inexpressible agony. In that instant a strange glance of eager recognition overspread her haggard countenance, and quickly he clasped his strong arms tenderly about her. The muscles of her face slowly relaxed, and she shuddered in his embrace.

Next instant he detected the terrible truth. Her cool lace-trimmed blouse of pale heliotrope silk was soaked with blood issuing from her breast. There was a wound there, just above the heart.

Her white lips moved in a frantic, desperate effort to speak, but her tongue refused to articulate. Her slight frame was again shaken by the convulsive shivering, a sudden paralysis seized her, then, with a long, deep-drawn sigh, the light faded from her blanched face, her heart ceased its feeble beating, and next second her body lay in his arms chilly, rigid, still.

He cried aloud to her in his agonised despair, but she was silent, her great blue eyes, those wondrous eyes that had held him beneath their spell, gazing into space, fixed and fast glazing.

Violette, his dainty, mysterious, unknown love, was dead.

CHAPTER III

THE TRAIL OF THE UNKNOWN

O'DONOVAN's shouts attracted the cabman beyond the iron railings, and very quickly a couple of policemen appeared upon the scene. For a few minutes there was a scene of wild excitement within the quiet little garden; then, after a cursory examination, a stretcher was brought from the Morgue over the way, the body of the unknown girl placed upon it and conveyed away to the House of the Dead, while Teddy was arrested and escorted to the police office attached to the mortuary, where, after some little delay, he was searched and closely questioned.

The blood upon his hands was regarded with considerable suspicion by the police commissary, or the *quart d'œil* as he is known to the students, but owing to the fortunate circumstances of a workman having seen him enter the garden, and a cabman swearing that he had heard the report like that of a revolver fully a quarter of an hour before, he experienced little difficulty in establishing his innocence of the crime.

News rapidly spreading that the body of a murdered woman had been brought there, and that the assassin had been caught, quickly caused a great crowd to assemble around the Morgue, awaiting the exposure of the corpse, and eager to catch a glimpse of the murderer when he came forth in custody. Meanwhile, however, the body of poor Violette had been searched, and absolutely nothing

was discovered upon her which would lead to her identity. She wore no jewellery, and in her purse, which contained about ten francs in silver and copper, there was no card or scrap of anything of value as a clue.

The heartbroken student's story of how carefully she had concealed her identity was listened to rather incredulously by the police, who carefully made notes as to dates and places. Then there was a long pause. The affair was certainly veiled in mystery, but it was apparent from the conversation of the three astute detectives present that they believed her to be a lady moving in good society.

'You say she generally took a cab when she left you,' one of the officers exclaimed at length, addressing O'Donovan. 'Do you think you could identify any of the cabmen?'

'Yes, one,' he answered, after a few seconds' reflection. At that moment it suddenly flashed across his mind that from these men who drove her so often he could long ago have found out where she went. 'There's one man, stout and white-haired, who drove her several times,' he added.

'Where was he stationed?' the detective inquired eagerly.

'Just opposite here. The rank outside the garden.'

'Describe him.'

'Fat, red-faced, short white hair,' O'Donovan replied.

'Lepine,' observed the detective, decisively, and turning to a subordinate, he told him to go out and find the man immediately.

Ten minutes later the stout, ruddy-faced cab-driver, a typical Parisian *cocher*, was ushered into the bare, business-like police-office. He had just returned from taking a fare to Passy when the police hailed him, and knowing nothing of the tragic affair which had happened during his absence from the rank, wondered what offence he had committed.

'Pierre Lepine, number 2,734 — eh?' sharply inquired

the official who, seated at the table, was engaged in the investigation.

‘*Oui, m’sieur.*’

‘I want you to view the body of a lady, and say if you recognise her. Pinson, go with him.’

The cab-driver, relieved to find that he had not contravened any of the thousand and one rules by which the police bind the public conveyances of Paris, followed his guide into the adjoining room.

A few moments later he returned, and stated to his interrogator that the dead lady was well-known to him by sight.

‘Where did you see her?’ the official asked.

‘She used to meet this gentleman nightly,’ indicating Teddy, ‘in the little garden over the way.’

‘Anything else?’

‘I drove her once or twice.’

‘Where to?’

The man hesitated, as if reflecting.

‘To several places, m’sieur.’

‘Name one.’

‘To the Place de l’Opéra.’

‘What number?’

‘She descended opposite the Café de l’Opéra and walked away.’

‘She met nobody?’

‘Nobody.’

‘Describe another instance of her riding in your cab,’ the official said, in the same dry, business-like tones he had used throughout. To him the investigation of murder was of almost everyday occurrence.

‘One night, about a week ago, she left the gentleman at the gate of the Rue du Cloître and told me to drive to the Place de l’Opéra. When, however, we got as far as

the Palais Royal she altered her mind, and ordered me to take her to the Place Pigalle.'

'Well?'

'She alighted at the corner of the Place, and I watched her enter the Rat Mort.'

'The Rat Mort!' exclaimed the official, raising his eyebrows and looking sharply at the cabman. 'Are you quite certain of this?'

'Absolutely, m'sieur.'

'You drove away, I suppose?'

'Yes,' the man replied. Then, after reflection, he added, 'The only other time I recollect driving her was one night, after telling me in the gentleman's hearing to take her to the Place de l'Opéra, she drove to an address in the Boulevard Magenta, but I forget the number. She called there for a young man, a foreigner, English or German, and I drove them both to a large house in the Avenue du Trocadéro. They did not speak French, so I could not overhear what they said. The man was about twenty-five, tall, thin, well-dressed, evidently a gentleman. I believe they had quarrelled, but couldn't say for certain.'

'What led you to believe they had quarrelled?'

'Well, I thought so by their manner,' the man answered. 'The lady seemed highly indignant and displeased.'

'Would you be able to recognise her companion again?' inquired the official, suddenly interested.

'Yes, but not the house I drove them to. I forget the number.'

'Don't you think you would recognise either house — if you tried very hard?' insinuated his interrogator.

'No, m'sieur,' replied the man, twisting his hat in his hand. 'I'm ready to go with the police, however, and try and identify the man. I believe he was English.'

The police official, turning to the O'Donovan, said:

‘You mentioned, I think, that this lady you knew as Violette spoke English.’

‘Yes,’ Teddy replied. ‘She spoke it so well that, save for one or two accentuated words, she might easily have been taken for an Englishwoman.’

‘You are English, and could of course detect whether or not she was a compatriot.’

‘She was not English,’ Teddy replied promptly. ‘No doubt she was a Parisienne. Her French had not the slightest provincial accent.’

‘The fact that she would not reveal her real name, or explain where she lived, or who she was, handicaps us severely,’ the official observed, blotting the large sheet of yellow official foolscap whereon he had been writing the depositions of the cabman. ‘That some deep, inscrutable mystery lies behind all this seems evident. We must try if we cannot discover some clue to her identity. When the body is exhibited somebody may come forward and tell us something. At present the facts are indeed very puzzling.’

‘But her death,’ the young student exclaimed huskily. ‘It is terrible — terrible.’

‘Yes,’ the official said, in a more sympathetic tone. ‘A great blow to you, no doubt. From the appearance of the wound she was evidently shot at close quarters, probably while sitting on the seat awaiting you. It is certainly strange that only one man, a cabman, should have heard the shot, and to him it apparently never occurred that it had been fired in the garden. The assassin must have approached her, held her in conversation, and before she became aware of her danger whipped out a revolver and emptied one barrel full into her breast. Her blouse is singed, showing how near the weapon must have been held.’

‘If I had not been late for the appointment, her life would have been saved,’ the young man observed despondently.

‘No doubt,’ answered the official. ‘But in such cases regrets are useless. Our duty is first to obtain her identification, and then to try and find the assassin. It appears, however, that your information cannot assist us in the least, therefore I think there is no further need for you to remain. We have your address.’

‘But the man she met in the Boulevard Magenta after leaving me. Cannot he be found?’ O’Donovan asked.

‘If he is in Paris, he will no doubt be discovered. If, however, he is a foreigner, English or German, as seems most likely, he may have left France by this time,’ the official replied. ‘We shall do our best to find him.’

‘Then I am no longer wanted?’ Teddy blurted forth.

‘No. Pinson, show this gentleman out,’ and a few moments later O’Donovan found himself among the eager, struggling crowd who were fighting with one another to obtain a glance at the face of his murdered love. The scene was one of wild excitement, the surging multitude, which nearly blocked the roadway, jostling each other in their efforts to file past the great dingy window looking like an empty shop-front, beyond which the body was exposed to the public gaze for identification. The young student struggled to get free of the crowd and breathe fresh air, but overwhelmed by the press about him, he was forced on close to the window. He saw that they had wrapped the body in a coarse brown blanket, leaving only the face exposed, that white, sweet face that he loved so well. At her feet, close to the glass, were spread her dress, her corsets, and her underlinen, while upon a black board at her feet had been scrawled in chalk the number corresponding with the number in the police-register of unknowns. For three days she must remain there, in full view of that vulgar jeering crowd, then, if unidentified,

would be buried in a nameless grave beside suicides, paupers, and the social wreckage of Paris.

As he was pressed forward to this window, which was the centre of attraction, coarse, brutal comments on every side fell upon his ear. The report had spread that he was the murderer, that he, her lover, had been taken red-handed, and that she was well-known at the El Dorado. He tried to turn back, but the crowd, not recognising him, pushed him forward, and, glancing over his shoulder, he saw, mingling with that morbid mob, three of the detectives who had been present at his interrogation. With that promptness characteristic of the Paris police, they had already commenced their investigations, and were now jostling with the crowd with eyes and ears open ready for any chance remark that might fall from the lips of those who came to inspect the body. For the assassin the body of his victim exercises a curious magnetic influence. He is drawn towards it by an irresistible desire to gloat over his crime, and times without number the murderer has been arrested while standing before that great window, fascinated by the dead face before him. For that reason, whenever the body of a murdered person is exposed in the Morgue, the place swarms with detectives.

O'Donovan, his brain awlirl by the swift and crushing blow which had fallen upon him, fought his way out into the road, and stood for a moment breathing the fresh night air. The jeering multitude, the sickly gas lights, the cold, still face of his dead beloved, held him like some terrible nightmare, and he gazed back at the House of the Dead shuddering. Before him, in that dark little garden opposite, Violette, his mysterious unknown, had been foully done to death even while he had stood idly gossiping with the poet Dechaume. A great shudder swept through him. The thought held him stupefied, paralysed. He now felt

such bitterness of heart that he could no longer remain in Paris, and staggering forward, started off to walk straight before him, without knowing why or whither.

In the Boulevard de la Madeleine he raised his eyes. His surroundings surprised him. Never before had he paid attention to the magnificent shops open to the full light, the motley tints upon the house-fronts, the glaring posters, the lighted kiosks, and the mighty traffic in the roadway and on the asphalted pavement. Cafés, wine-shops, and restaurants flared; the façade of Olympia was aglow with a thousand tiny lamps; running newsmen were crying the latest editions of the scurrilous gutter-journals; while painted women, with skirts held in mock-modesty, glanced interrogatively at every man who passed. It was a strange, bustling, pleasure-seeking world, this world of Paris. How stupefying and torturing it all was!

From every café the tables overflowed upon the pavement, and the customers sat with *bock* or *mazagran* enjoying the cool air after the blazing, breathless day. From Olympia, as he passed, came the strains of music and the strident voice of some female artist singing 'C'qui gna noilien?'; around him on every side a universal longing for gaiety, ease, and gratification of every desire seemed to spread, and away before him shone like moons the great globes of the electric lights in the Place de l'Opéra.

The spot he was approaching brought back to him recollections of Violette. He paused on the kerb and asked himself, irritated and wondering, why he was there. He, gay *romanichel* that he was, had been carried on by his gloomy reverie, and had no knowledge of having traversed the many streets between the Île de la Cité and the boulevards; he had been utterly unconscious of everything but the one deep, poignant grief that had overwhelmed him.

He was heart-sick, tired of that world of want and crime, of wealth and vice, of joy and bitterness. In that moment his emotion came to a crisis, and he distressfully pondered as to whither he should go, now that all his hopes had been shattered.

‘Home, yes,’ he murmured at last. ‘I’ll go home and tell them both. At least I shall have their sympathy,’ and with heavy feet and tumultuous brain he turned back towards the Madeleine, jostling with the foot-passengers, and retracing his steps towards the Seine.

Bertram and Jean had eaten their frugal repast at Mother Géry’s and had returned, when he entered slowly, his face white and scared.

‘*Dieu!*’ cried the young Breton, the first to notice him. ‘What has happened?’

The Bouchon, the gay, reckless painter whose burly form was so familiar to everybody in the ‘Boul. Mich.’ staggered to the old wooden armchair, sank into it, and remained for a long time in silence, with bent head, despairing, heart-broken. He had an unbearable sense of being crushed, overwhelmed in the confusion of his distress, and the life throbbing in him was wrought to an intolerable fever. His body racked him with the over-consciousness of itself, and for awhile thought forbore him in the physical relief of pain. Both men stood before him, alarmed and surprised, demanding to know what had occurred; but not until they had repeated their inquiries many times did he speak.

‘She is dead,’ he said simply, in trembling voice.

‘She — who? — your Violette?’ asked Rosmead, amazed.

‘Yes,’ he answered hoarsely; ‘she’s been murdered?’

‘Murdered!’ both men gasped.

‘I found her — two hours ago — dying, shot through the heart,’ the young Irishman explained brokenly, his gaze still

fixed upon the ragged carpet from which the pattern had years ago disappeared.

At first his companions were incredulous, but presently, in broken tones and disjointed sentences, he told them how he had discovered her, how he had been arrested as the murderer, and the investigation that had followed. He related the cabman's story, and when he described how his well-beloved had gone that night to the Rat Mort, Jean and Bertram exchanged meaning glances. The young Breton remembered their conversation earlier in the evening, and fell to wondering whether, after all, Rosmead knew more of her than he admitted. It was curious, to say the least, that he should have suggested such an imputation, and still stranger that his suspicion should be so quickly borne out by such indisputable evidence.

O'Donovan concluded at last, setting his teeth firmly to prevent tears escaping him, his chin upon his breast, in an attitude of blank despair. The hearts of his two firm friends had gone out in sympathy, even though neither had approved of their friend's acquaintance with the fair unknown. There certainly had been an element of romance in it; but alas! the romance had ended in a dire, dismal tragedy.

'Extraordinary!' Rosmead remarked, bewildered, when his friend had concluded. 'What object, I wonder, could she have had in concealing all her movements so carefully? Her motive was a strong one, without doubt.'

'She may have been married,' hazarded Jean; 'and, like many another woman, did not wish her lover to know.'

This certainly seemed a natural solution of the problem, and all three discussed it, Rosmead inclining to the matter-of-fact theory that the man she had met in the Boulevard Magenta was actually her husband, and he, watching her

keeping her tryst with Teddy, had been seized with jealousy, approached, and shot her.

O'Donovan let them talk, but said nothing. He looked at them gravely, but saw them not; he only saw the whiteness, the wanness of a face set in red-brown hair, with stony eyes that stared out blindly.

CHAPTER IV

FOSCA

WEEKS passed, and what is called 'all Paris' — women of society, politicians, financiers, and writers — were returning from Trouville, Arcachon, Royat, or Etretat, where the season had ended. There had been a lull in political scandals, therefore the papers, especially those sensational boulevard journals which are hawked at the cafés, had been full of the 'Mystery of Notre Dame.' The body of poor Violette, however, remaining unidentified, had, after being photographed, been buried in a nameless grave at the expense of the municipality, and so the strange affair had become numbered with the many mysteries of the City of Pleasure.

The police, of which no more astute detectors of crime exist than those at that time controlled by Monsieur Goron, had exerted every effort to obtain knowledge of who or what she was, but without avail. So careful had she been to conceal her identity that not even the cleverest detectives in Paris could discover a single clue.

At first poor Teddy remained crushed, inert, and melancholy. The ashes of the past lay thick upon his honest heart. He was altogether a creature of habit. He could not break out of old ways as other men did with that superb dash that conquered the prizes of life; he sat prisoned within himself, brooding ever over his grief, even though he strove to laugh as airily as in those happy days gone by.

Violette, whose sweet face had charmed him so, had gone out of his life, and he was left lonely and sad to nurse his sorrow, and to ponder on what might have been. Deliberately, weakly, he drifted before the scudding hours, regretting with an agony of regret, ever enveloped in a growing bitterness and desolation. Thus, in that room high up above the Seine, the few weeks passed in a quietness that wore the air of tranquillity. Rosmead and Jean worked steadily on at their easels, looking at each other from behind a screen of sorrow, and poor Teddy was complacent, calm, serious, smileless, spending hours smoking and pondering in that old armchair, the wood of which was black and polished by the generations of students who had used it. It was only now that he perceived the loneliness in which every soul must sit.

At last, however, his two friends, after many futile attempts, succeeded in arousing him. There was work to do — yes, work; it was a narcotic; it would make him sleep, it would make him forget. So one morning he rose, took a fresh canvas, and started a fresh picture. Into his work he threw his whole energies, and though he never forgot that strangely romantic and tragic incident in the little garden behind Notre Dame, he gradually went forth again of an evening among his old friends, to Mother Géry's, Father Gros's, or that little café known as 'The Monkey's' half-way up the 'Boul. Mich.,' where the students, mostly from the medical schools, were in the habit of nightly assembling. Teddy's sorrow was an open secret in Bohemia, and in that curious, unique little world all sympathised with him, though never once was the strange affair referred to in his hearing.

Meanwhile his idleness had given place to a sudden outburst of unwonted industry. He worked hard, and worked well. His picture was a quaint piece of fancy, full of in-

vention and varied detail, representing a nude figure reading. When finished, it showed a high level of technical achievement and vigour of handling which at once placed him far above his fellows. It possessed, too, the qualities of glowing and transparent colour, and fell short of real mastery only because it lacked something of that sensitiveness in the explanation of form and texture which alone can give to flesh-painting the right type of beauty.

On Sunday afternoon towards the end of September, Fosca Farini left the *magasin*, crossed the Petit Pont, and ascending the four long flights of worn and dirty stairs which led to the abode of the Bohemian trio, burst into their room like a ray of sunshine on a winter's day.

'Here I am, as usual,' she cried, laughing gaily. 'Kisses for all of you.'

'And a big one, the biggest of *bécots*, for Bertram — eh?' Jean said, retreating from his easel a few paces, and holding his head on one side to contemplate the effect.

'Yes,' she answered, with a careless air, as she tossed her sunshade and gloves upon the old frayed couch by the window. 'The very biggest.' And Rosmead, his face beaming with happiness, sprang from the armchair where he had been lazily reading, and grasped her tiny hand in glad welcome.

She was neat and dainty, with a well-formed figure, a slim waist, and, although of Italian parentage, possessed that easy, swinging gait so characteristic of the Parisienne, a curious freedom of limb that was all her own. Dark-haired, dark-eyed, with a complexion which plainly betrayed her Southern blood, she was of an odd, particular beauty that was as indescribable and as fugitive as the scent of a flower. Her face was handsome in its splendid correction of line and colour, and her eyes were of that brilliant lustre, which caused her to be admired, even when

habited in her plain black gown, with its severe little collar and cuffs tied with black ribbon. Her youth having been spent with the Marquis and his ailing spouse in Bohemia, she cared little for the ordinary conventions, and continually shocked her fellow-assistants with her outspoken speech, her high spirits, and her inconvenient enthusiasm; yet, with it all, she was essentially shrewd and clear-eyed, and not to be led into excess.

‘Hulloa!’ Teddy cried, airily looking across from his easel. ‘What, another new dress, Fosca? You look charming.’

‘My first duty is to be charming, my dear Teddy,’ she answered gaily. ‘I might also try to be original, you know. But it isn’t good form for any of us girls to do anything that we can’t do becomingly. A thing is only indecent when it’s ugly; but everything that is ugly is indecent. And excessive goody-goody is indecent, because — well, because it unbecomes your neighbours.’

The three men laughed. Her glow and sparkle made her strangely radiant, and as she stood before the easels, contemplating the progress made with the pictures since her last visit, a week before, she observed that the Bouchon had been commendably diligent, but that her lover had indulged in his usual laziness.

‘I’ve been reading,’ Rosmead said, standing beside her.

‘Yes, always reading horribles and things,’ the pretty Italian pouted. ‘Why don’t you paint, like Teddy?’

There was an awkward pause.

‘Because I can’t,’ her lover answered at last. ‘I’m one of the failures.’

‘Failures!’ echoed his vivacious love. ‘A man should never admit that he’s vanquished.’

‘I don’t,’ Rosmead answered airily. ‘I merely frankly declare that I made a mistake in taking up a profession

for which I had absolutely no aptitude.' Then, after a moment's hesitation, he added, 'Now that you've cornered me, I'll tell you all a secret. Of late I've been trying to write poetry.'

'Poetry!' they cried in surprise, while Teddy, turning on his stool, his palette still upon his thumb, and a *caporal* between his lips, said severely, 'By what right have you secreted from us this most important and entertaining piece of intelligence? So it's the Poet Rosmead now, is it? You'll have to grow your back hair a bit longer, old chap, before anybody will take you seriously.'

'Well, would you like to hear one?' the young Englishman asked. 'It's in French, of course,' and then, in response to their enthusiastic demands, he took from between the leaves of a book a sheet of note-paper, and in a rather uncertain voice, read from it the pencilled lines of a madrigal as follows:—

Belle, vous croyez que j'ignore
 Pourquoi chaque matin l'aurore,
 À son réveil,
 Couvre le sol d'une rosée
 Aux perles d'opale irisée,
 O vient se mirer le soleil.

Belle, si la rosée inonde
 La vieille terre de son onde
 Aux sept couleurs,
 C'est qu'en vous voyant si jolie
 L'aube tombe en mélancolie
 Et de dépit verse des pleurs.

'Excellent! Bravo!' they cried, but Jean, who had read widely before coming to Paris, and whose opinion on literary matters was generally sought, said:

'You must alter your style a little. It smacks too much of Xavier Privas.'

‘And you must be a trifle more immoral if you want to succeed as a *fin-de-siècle* poet,’ Teddy chimed in, laughing. ‘If a poet isn’t naughty nowadays, nobody reads him.’

‘I think it’s beautiful,’ declared Fosca. ‘I never dreamt that Bertram was a poet. And fancy writing French like that, when he’s an Englishman.’

‘You forget,’ said her lover, ‘that my mother was French, and that I learnt the Parisian accent at her knee.’

‘Then you’ve absolutely given up art?’ inquired the dark-eyed girl, sitting upon the edge of the plain deal table, littered with his books and newspapers.

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘Look at my work,’ and he pointed to the canvas upon his easel, now quite dry and dusty, for it had not been touched for a fortnight. ‘Are its defects not sufficient to show that I’m merely wasting time? I’ve idled long enough. I must work now — or starve,’ he added bitterly.

‘But will poetry pay?’ Fosca queried. She was a light-hearted, brainless butterfly, but in her graver moments could be terribly serious.

‘No,’ answered Teddy, decisively. ‘Poetry don’t pay. If you’ve got a private income, then write verse; if you haven’t, then, by attempting poetry, you are taking your first step on the shortest cut to the workhouse.’

Rosmead, thoughtful and silent, was convinced that his friend spoke the truth. All the poets he had known, with the exception, perhaps, of Dechaume, the gross obscenity of whose verses had brought him into notoriety, were terribly poor. This truth had been forced upon him many times of late, yet he could not resist writing down the words which jingled for ever in his brain. In those hours when his two companions had been painting, he had covered sheet after sheet with verses, good, bad, and in-

different, but, fearing derision, he had always concealed the fact from his companions, who had believed he was writing letters.

‘If poetry doesn’t pay,’ observed Fosca at last, ‘why not write romance?’

‘Ah!’ sighed the young Englishman, wistfully. ‘If I only could.’

‘You haven’t tried,’ she said encouragingly.

‘Novelists make easy fortunes,’ observed the O’Donovan. ‘In that direction true fame lies. I’ve heard of men in England getting a couple of thousand pounds for two months’ work. I believe that when a novelist once makes a name, he literally rakes in the needful like a croupier at Monte Carlo.’

‘But I couldn’t construct a plot or write a story to save my life,’ protested Bertram. ‘When I reflect upon the wonderful plots of Sue, Dumas, and Du Boisgobey, the realism of Zola, and the minute pictures of life penned by Dickens, I’m bewildered. How can anyone hope to write with success, or ever gain a public who have already such marvellous works before them? No, I could never write novels — never.’

‘Try, Bertram, try,’ Fosca urged. ‘Endeavour to write a *feuilleton* for the *Petit Journal* or the *Figaro*.’

But Rosmead, his dark, serious eyes fixed tenderly upon her, shook his head in sorrow.

‘No,’ he answered, ‘I have no talent in that direction. It’s utterly impossible.’

‘Nothing should be pronounced impossible before you’ve made the attempt,’ said the girl, with a philosophical air, exchanging a quick glance with Jean. ‘You must try. And I’ll make you.’

Whereat they all laughed merrily in unison.

An hour later, after Fosca, seated in the armchair, had

smoked one of her lover's *caporals* with that natural *abandon* which caused her to be so popular throughout the Quartier, the pair, laughing merrily, went out together, mounting to the top of the green omnibus at the corner of the Place des Pyramides, and riding to the Porte de la Muette. It was their usual Sunday excursion, for it only cost twenty centimes, and was a long ride through the airiest and best part of Paris. On Sunday afternoons there was then, as now, always a scramble for seats on the top of those great, long, three-horse 'buses, for on a warm evening it was delightful to drive along those leafy avenues, past the residences of the wealthy, and enter the great broad *allées* of the Bois. When they alighted, the day was already waning, and in the sunset they wandered on along the quiet by-paths, hand in hand, past the Auteuil racecourse, and around the edge of the lake, where the willows drooped until their foliage trailed in the water, and the children were feeding the swans with biscuits and bread.

Life was, indeed, dull and monotonous, for ever importuning women to purchase reticella, Venetian point, or *point d'Argentan*, and these Sunday outings were to Fosca a source of innocent delight. In those long summer hours when she stood at her counter whereon her wares were displayed, she sighed often for those green fields and purple mountains she remembered when a child, those far-off Apennines beneath which she had lived several years with her aunt in the little Tuscan village. But in that Quartier beyond the Seine where she had spent her later youth with her wild, dissipated father and invalid mother, there was little fresh air, for, truth to tell, the secret abode of the Marquis was in a narrow, dirty street which bore, perhaps, the most evil reputation of any in the Fifth Arrondissement, which is saying a good deal. Those Sunday evening rambles were particularly enjoyable, because they took her out

of herself as she watched the carriages with the grand folk driving home to dine, and felt that she, too, for that brief hour, was free, happy, and careless as these women who lolled among their cushions, and surveyed the world through their lorgnettes. Like most other girls employed in shops, she was dissatisfied; the restraint galled her; for she inherited a restless spirit from the Marquis, and was ever longing for the day when she could leave the *magasin*, and escape for ever the severe eye of that hook-nosed head saleswoman.

As they strolled on arm in arm, with the liquid gold of the sunset full in their faces, she related to him, as lovers will, all the little incidents of the past few days, sighing when she spoke of the terrible monotony and weariness of her life, while he, pressing her hand, repeated for the hundredth time his declaration of love and devotion. They were a well-matched pair, these two; he, broad-shouldered, happy-faced, with refined, regular features, notwithstanding his shabby clothes, and she so beautiful that often those women in carriages whom she envied turned back to look at her.

Student and shop-girl adored each other.

To-day Bertram's frank acknowledgment that he was tired of art had troubled her. In other words, it meant to her that he was weary of life in that dull, dingy sky-parlour, just as she was weary of the eternal turmoil of the gigantic *magasin*, where the army of assistants was a mere machine, and where, with tired feet and aching head, she worked on mechanically with but one thought — the freedom of the approaching Sunday.

'You speak despondingly,' she said presently, when they had been discussing Teddy's latest picture. 'If you feel you cannot make a name in art, try something else. You must really write a romance. It would be such fun to see your name in print.'

‘Impossible,’ he declared. ‘It would be years before I could earn sufficient to keep me, and I have no private income, like Teddy or Jean will some day have. The people of both are rich, and if they turn out failures, it doesn’t so much matter. But as for me ——’ and he sighed, without concluding his sentence.

‘Well, suppose you fail, what then?’ she asked, glancing at him with a strange look in her eyes.

‘If I fail,’ he said, in a low, troubled voice, ‘if I fail, Fosca, I starve.’

‘Are your people in England poor, then?’ she asked, in a quiet, sympathetic voice.

‘I have no people,’ he answered huskily. ‘They both died long ago, and I exist merely on charity — the charity of an uncle who in a few months will cut off my allowance, and I shall be thrown on the world penniless.’

She sighed. Her lover’s future was not a brilliant outlook. Tears rose in her fine eyes as she tightened the pressure on his hand, and looked up into his dark, pensive face. It was the first time she had seen him so melancholy, the first time, too, that he had spoken of his relatives or position. Previously he had been as gay, happy, and reckless as any of his fellow-students, regarding the comedy of life with an airiness with which only the true bred child of Bohemia can treat it, laughing in the face of the demon Poverty, and setting at naught all the *convenances*. To-day, however, he seemed nervous and uneasy; he was flushed darkly about his temples, and his eyes glittered feverishly. He felt sick, as we all do when things happen athwart our everyday peacefulness. One does not recognise the peace, except in the flash of its destruction.

‘Bertram, what is it? You are somehow not yourself,’ she cried tremulously, noticing his grief.

‘Nothing, only that I love you.’

His voice was a little thick and strained; it seemed to break into a feeble shrillness, as if he were excited and shaken.

‘Is that any reason why you should be so sad?’ she asked, with wide-open, reproachful eyes.

‘I am sad, and also jealous, because others have talents that I have not,’ he answered slowly, and with emphasis. ‘The men who have money and rich friends have genius; those who are poor have none. I’m one of the latter.’

‘Am I not poor, too?’ she said. ‘We love each other, therefore we may surely face the world together. Strive, strive on, and some day, sooner or later, we shall marry and be happy. You know that I am yours.’

‘Ah, yes, darling,’ he answered, pausing, and drawing her closer to him. They were among the trees, far from the frequented paths, therefore he placed his arm about her neck, and imprinted a long, passionate kiss upon her full red lips. ‘You are a brave little woman, indeed, to speak like this. You know full well, darling, I adore you fondly and truly. For your sake I’m ready to do anything.’

And as she looked up into his eyes, she saw by their clear, honest depths that he spoke the truth. But she did not reply. Her heart was too full for words, and they walked on in silence.

Rosmead loved her with his whole soul. Her face alone was ever before him in that high-up, dingy old studio, the remembrance of her sweet, musical voice ever rang in his ears above the reckless laughter at Mother Géry’s, and the recollection of her toiling so long and wearily in the great *magasin* beyond the Seine had kept him from indulging in many of those excesses inseparable from life in the Quartier.

As the sunset glow, now deepened to crimson, fell upon her, tinging her beautiful face and raven hair, he thought

she had never before looked so handsome. She was a trifle pale, perhaps unusually dark beneath the eyes, but that wan look was because her vivaciousness, her very life, was slowly being sapped by the monotonous drudgery of her daily labours, extending through thirteen hours, and interrupted only by two scrambles for meals.

He wanted to take her from that terrible soul-killing monotony, which he knew was slowly undermining her health; but he could not. He was poor, almost penniless, and had yet to make his mark ere he would be able to marry her. Before he had known her, he had been without ambition, without a thought of the morrow, a Bohemian to the very core. But the knowledge that by dint of hard work he might gain her, had fired him with ambition, and for months he had fondly and secretly cherished the idea of abandoning art for literature. Surreptitiously he had written those poems to try his hand. To-day, for the first time, he had invited criticism, yet he had been crushed by the bitter truth forced upon him that there was little fame and no money in the production of verse. To become a minor poet without means was, he was compelled to admit, sheer imbecility; in literature there were but two courses open — fiction or journalism.

Not until the brilliant afterglow had faded and the shadows deepened, they passed out of the Bois along the avenue which leads to Passy, and having taken a *mazagran* at that little restaurant close to the station which the students so often patronised, they walked on as far as the Place du Trocadéro, whence they took an omnibus back to the Hôtel de Ville. As they passed the front of Notre Dame, the men were already lighting the gas lamps in the Place, and the sight of the dark, gloomy, shabby Rue du Cloître brought back to her remembrance the mysterious death of Violette.

‘I wonder,’ she exclaimed, after a pause, ‘I wonder if the police will ever discover who killed her?’

‘Who?’ he inquired quickly.

‘The woman your friend O’Donovan loved so well,’ she answered, with a strange hardness in her voice, and an emphasis upon the word ‘woman.’

‘Perhaps they may some day,’ he answered mechanically, his thoughts afar off. ‘We have an old saying in English, that “murder will out.”’

She held her breath for a single instant, and the evening gloom concealed the sudden pallor which overspread her features.

‘But they haven’t yet discovered who she really was,’ she gasped. ‘They never will — I’m sure they can’t.’

‘Why?’ he inquired, rather surprised at her assertion and the tone of voice in which it was uttered.

‘Well,’ and she laughed a strange, harsh, almost hysterical laugh. ‘Because it is impossible.’

Together they crossed the tiny Pont aux Doubles, and he, bewitched by the tenderness of her smiles, and confident of her affection, allowed the subject to drop, thinking no more of her words.

Yet, within a week from that memorable night, the pleasant, careless life of the Bohemian trio, who had spent three well-remembered years together, was suddenly interrupted, for early one morning Jean, the silent, thoughtful Jean, received a telegram from Morlaix, recalling him home to Brittany immediately, on account of a sudden illness of his father. It was a blow to his two companions, but, assuring them that he would soon be back, he left the Gare St. Lazare with their heartiest good wishes.

Rosmead and O’Donovan, having seen him off, returned to their rooms a little melancholy, but nevertheless confident that in a week or so their friend would return to

resume the old, easy, careless life. Knowledge of the hideous truth, however, was not long delayed, for the evening post brought an explanatory letter from Fosca.

The short, brief note, evidently hurriedly penned, was addressed to Bertram. She declared that she had grown tired of life at the Louvre, and finding him so poor as to be unable to take her from it, she had accepted an offer made her by Jean, and had left Paris with him.

Rosmead, in his amazement, read aloud this cruel, heartless letter to the bitter end, then, with it still in his trembling hand, he sank, crushed and grief-stricken, into the old armchair, and covering his face, burst into a flood of tears.

O'Donovan, with a deep sigh of sympathy, placed his hand tenderly upon his friend's shoulder. He tried to speak, to utter some words of regret and encouragement, but his voice quivered so that he could say no word.

The dead silence of that old room was unbroken, save for the dull roar of the wild, turbulent City of Pleasure, which came up across the Seine, and mingled with the convulsive sobs of the man, the light of whose life had so suddenly been extinguished.

CHAPTER V

IN A LONDON SUBURB

IT was summer in one of the dullest, dreariest, and most dismal of London suburbs. A year had passed since that well-remembered night when Bertram Rosmead had received the letter which had crushed his soul, and since then his life had been a strange series of ups and downs. He had left Paris the day after, and with scarce a franc in his pocket, had tramped the long dusty highroads into Germany, existing as best he could by performing various kinds of menial labour, but often trudging far on an empty stomach, his heart heavy with its burden of sorrow.

After Fosca's perfidy, his one thought was to leave Paris, to place as great a distance as possible between himself and the scenes he so well remembered, to rid himself of all that would remind him of her, and of his futile student life. Three whole years, the best years of his life, had been utterly wasted; therefore, was there any wonder that his uncle, who had begrudged every penny spent upon him, was now furious? His allowance had been cut off, and for a time matters assumed the gravest of aspects. But this life of wandering suited him, Bohemian that he was. If only he could rid himself of all remembrance of the past — of Jean's perfidy, and Fosca's fickleness — he would have been quite content. But her false declarations of love and affection were ever within his brain, and he remembered, with bitter vividness, those love-looks that she had exchanged

with the young Breton on that Sunday afternoon when he had read his first poor attempt at verse. He ground his teeth and increased his pace whenever he thought of it. Thus, shabby, dusty, weary and travelworn, he slowly made his way across the frontier into the German Rhineland.

In those well-remembered autumn days, when he wandered up the white highway that wound through the smiling Moselle valley past Alf, the pretty village embowered in its vineyards, Berncastel, with its historic schloss, and quaint mediæval Cochem, his heart overflowed with poignant sorrow. Hitherto he had been merry, easy-going, and reckless; but now all had changed. In his long, lonely journeys he nursed his sorrow in silence, tramping forward, ever forward, towards the Rhine. The old post diligence, lumbering along the valley from Trèves to Coblenz, overtook him daily, smothering him with dust, and the one little steamer upon the river snorted past him, leaving him behind; but he heeded not the things about him so long as he had a drink of milk and a crust.

Those were strange, eventful days, with morning mists and mid-day sunshine, with glorious evenings, and dark, chilly nights, when, sleeping in out-houses, the cold had penetrated to his bones. From the Quai Montebello to the far-off Dom Platz, in Cologne, he tramped every foot of the way; then, his uncle, relenting, sent him money, and he returned to England. For several weeks he remained at Frilsham Towers, his uncle's country house, near Deal; but finding that his presence was regarded with annoyance by his two cousins, superior young men, who looked upon the ne'er-do-well student as an interloper, he resolved to make a bold attempt to join the profession which was now his highest ambition, that of literature.

Of all the professions, that of letters is most difficult to enter. The young man who makes the rash resolve to

become an author has about as much chance of attaining popularity as a lawyer's clerk has of obtaining a seat on the woolsack. A course of diligent study and careful training will fit the average young man for any of the other professions; but to literature there is no royal road, no school beyond that great school, the world, no examination to cram for, no diploma to obtain. The man who writes and obtains popularity is the man who, by his own personal experience, his own ups and downs in life, his sorrows, his joys, his own affairs of the heart, has acquired a wide and varied knowledge of the world beyond his own circle, and who can thus present vivid pictures of those phases of life which, although strange to his readers, are familiar to himself. The world itself is the only school of the writer of romance. By no books can he acquire that insight into life necessary before attempting to describe it; no professors can teach him how to write, or even indicate to him the lines on which he must travel to gain success.

A man first takes to writing fiction because he possesses the instinct of telling a story clearly and well; but he does not become a novelist until, after many years of diligent study, of heart-breaking disappointments and disheartening failure, he at length discovers for himself the *technique* of plot-construction, the careful adjustment of his scenes, the judicious use of his humour and pathos, and the subtle touches which will make or mar his *dénouement*. None of this can be taught. If the writer does not himself make the discovery, he fails, like thousands of others have failed before him; but if he acquires the art of writing fiction, he works on with his own peculiar *technique*, in his own peculiar manner, and perhaps with success, fame, and fortune. The circle of successful romance-writers is a very small one; but there is not a single man

among them who has not previously followed some other avocation, not one who has not been the sport of fortune, not one who has not experienced failure after failure, and whose fond hopes of success have not been wrecked time after time, till all work seemed in vain, all thought of popularity but an empty dream. But with dogged persistency, with that airy light-heartedness with which the true Bohemian faces evil fortune, he has plodded on, still hoping, still achieving, still studying the everyday life about him, determined to obtain a hearing from the public. In not one instance alone does this happen, but in all. The successful author, an edition of whose new work is exhausted on the day of publication, whose portrait appears in the illustrated papers, with the appended interview, whose uneven scribble is sought by autograph collectors in all parts of the world, and whose last romance is criticised by every journal of note throughout England and America, seldom tells the public the bitter story of his earlier desperate struggles. The interviewer is always content with the present — the author's house, his study, his *bric-à-brac*, his great writing-table, with its litter of manuscript, books, and press-cuttings; his mode of work, and his recreation. Of the past the novelist says nothing. He has merely 'been through the mill,' as others have done. With that careless good humour which every successful writer possesses in more or less degree, he shrugs his shoulders and closes his mouth, a little hard, perhaps, when he reflects. But it is finished. Does not his agent possess, secure in that great iron safe in his fine suite of offices off the Strand, contracts with eager publishers which will keep him in work and in luxury for years to come; has he not mortgaged himself to the greedy readers of newspapers to produce serial after serial, which will be syndicated and published simultaneously in every part of

the world? Yes. He has striven and conquered. He laughs at the past as too trivial to relate to the interviewer. He is now popular.

Many young men believe that journalism forms an easy channel by which to drift into the higher branches of literature. Bertram Rosmead held this opinion, and, knowing nothing of the ways of journalistic life, and never having been inside a newspaper office, he, as is usual with the tyro, wrote to the editors of several of the London morning papers offering his services. The futile result of such applications may readily be imagined.

At length, however, by a lucky chance, he answered an advertisement which appeared in that journalistic medium, the *Daily News*, headed 'Reporter Wanted,' and a week later found himself in a very curious and embarrassing position. He had not been unwise enough to admit himself utterly unacquainted with journalism, and therefore the position which had been given him was the sole charge of a small, obscure, but old-established journal called the *Hounslow Standard*. The staff of this influential weekly organ, whose destinies he was to control, was not a large one. It consisted of himself alone. He was editor, sub-editor, reporter, and reader, and was expected to keep up a good personal appearance upon the sum of thirty shillings weekly. The office of that journal was, like himself, a little *bizarre*. It consisted of a small, mouldy-smelling shop in a bad state of repair, half-way up the long, dreary, straggling High Street of the dull, uninteresting suburban town, and behind in the garden was a shed in which half-a-dozen youths set type, while further on was a small out-house, originally built for a stable, but now euphemistically termed the 'machine-room,' containing, as it did, an old-fashioned press worked by a grunting gas-engine, which very often failed and had to be turned by hand. This

interesting piece of machinery was broken in places, and had been repaired with string.

Rosmead, during his three years on the Quai Montebello, had heard much grand talk of the influence of the Press, but after an inspection of the dingy office of that suburban organ, he admitted within himself that he was not impressed.

At first he dreaded lest he should display ignorance of his duties, but finding that the proprietor of the journal was an easy-going, pleasant man, who seldom, if ever, put his foot inside the office door, and left him to manage everything, he boldly commenced work.

He took up his quarters with a thin-faced widow, of the genus who had 'seen better days,' in one of a terrace of rather ramshackle houses which smelt of soap-suds, occupying the front sitting-room, a gloomy apartment, upholstered in faded red rep, as his living-room and study. Through the week he worked with that ardour begotten of enthusiasm, attending the police-court daily at the old market-town of Brentford — that uncleanly town, famous in story for its two kings — travelling as far afield as Staines or Hampton-on-Thames, to collect items of local interest, and at night attending concerts, lectures, tea-meetings, or penny-readings, in those galvanised-iron structures irreverently known as 'tin tabernacles.' He wrote that week two leaders and a column of those brief commenting paragraphs termed 'Local Notes,' and at last, late on Friday night, he stood beside the rumbling, antiquated press, and took therefrom a limp, damp copy of the first newspaper he had produced.

With it in his pocket, he strode airily home to his lodgings, and for an hour sat with it spread before him, contemplating it with the most profound satisfaction. The leaders had an imposing look. They were modelled upon

some he had that week read in the *Morning Post*, and were high-flown, one commencing with the straightforward assertion, 'We do not agree with Lord Salisbury.' The proprietor had given him instructions to write upon a pending election in the county from a purely impartial standpoint. Unfortunately, however, Rosmead, although he could talk by the hour of the shortcomings of the Floquet Ministry, the machinations of Gambetta, and the Royalist movement, knew nothing whatever of English politics. He was actually unaware whether the Government in power was Radical or Conservative, until he looked it up in that journalistic *vade-mecum*, 'Whitaker.' The idea of writing from an impartial standpoint had sorely puzzled him, therefore he had taken the two candidates for the seat, criticised their election addresses with equal asperity, and concluded by advising the electors to vote for both!

The amount of ridicule heaped upon the *Hounslow Standard* that week by its Radical contemporaries may easily be conjectured. The proprietor was furious, and poor Rosmead, extremely penitent, for the next three weeks existed in deadly fear of being discharged at the end of his month of approbation.

At the conclusion of the fourth week, when he received from the proprietor's wife his usual thirty shillings in silver, screwed up in a piece of newspaper, nothing was said about his dismissal; he therefore continued the duties of editorship, gradually obtaining knowledge of the technicalities of reporting, proof-reading, and printing, not without making a good many friends.

From the first his keen-eyed colleagues on the opposition journals in the district, whom he met daily at the various meetings he attended, saw that he could not write shorthand, and was evidently a beginner, on account of the

huge note-book and half-a-dozen carefully-sharpened pencils which he carried. There is, however, always a commendable *esprit de corps* among pressmen, and many a time one or other of the reporters of the journals which were his bitterest political opponents would send him a proof of the verbatim speech of some local notable on a subject of unusual interest, or exchange with him a carbon copy of the report of some meeting which he could not attend.

Very soon, among the little coterie of a dozen reporters who daily scoured West Middlesex 'picking up paragraphs,' Bertram Rosmead was acknowledged to be a good fellow, and there was not one who would not lend him a helping hand. But at night, when he returned home from the soul-killing dreariness of those Dissenting tea-meetings, juvenile dissolving-view entertainments, or amateur concerts, which were nightly held in one or other of the small towns or villages which constituted his district, he sat beneath his lamp, trying to write his leading article for the coming issue. With an amateur's lack of discretion, he chose hackneyed subjects, and struggled desperately to be original. They were lame, sorry attempts, these first steps in literature, even though he was profuse in his use of adjectives, and had his second-hand copy of the 'Thesaurus' ever at his elbow. They were a species of essay savoured with one or two incongruous expressions quoted, but not acknowledged, from the *Morning Post*, with a varied and wonderful punctuation, more remarkable for commas than for semicolons. He acknowledged long afterwards that for a year or two he did not know where to place a semicolon.

Still, he strove desperately for hours and hours, often until the paraffin gave out, and the grey morning showed through the chinks of the closed shutters. Then he would go out into the little front garden, and smell the roses,

fresh and delicious with the dew upon them, and allow the cool air of sunrise to fan his heated temples. He worked for that little, obscure journal night and day, for journalism was the profession he had chosen, and with dogged determination he was intent upon success.

Even there, in that little town, the most dismal perhaps of any within the twelve-mile radius, where whole rows of new houses were gaunt, windowless, and decaying, because no one had ever been found to live in them, the offer of a free season-ticket to the City being insufficient to induce persons to take up residence there, he found life full of variety. Hounslow is a mean and meagre town, notable for three things, — its barracks, its great gunpowder factory, and the number and variety of its lower-class public-houses ; but to Bertram Rosmead, who had often to attend a local wedding or an inquest in the same morning, or in the same evening report a sermon at the parish church and criticise a nigger entertainment at the Town Hall, life in those early, enthusiastic days was never dull.

Local feeling was always at fever-heat in Hounslow, and the representatives of the Press were always courteously entertained. At certain sittings of the Board of Guardians over at Isleworth, that quaint, old-world riverside village, untouched as yet by the hand of the vandal, there was provided a fine cold collation, washed down with a good brand of champagne, with cigars and Benedictine to follow ; while again, at the meeting of the Hounslow Burial Board, held at night in a tiny room on the first floor of an uncleanly pot-house, both the members of that body and 'the Press' smoked long clays and partook of a hearty supper of boiled leg of mutton and onions. This last-mentioned enlightened body were conspicuous for the inordinate length and asperity of their discussions, and were always a source of amusement to the editor-reporter

of the local *Standard*. It consisted of eight small tradesmen, who controlled the bare, miserable cemetery, and met once a month to look after the mortal remains of their departed fellow-townsmen. On such occasions they assembled around a beer-stained table in the upstairs room, the chair being taken by a retired carpenter, whose 'h's' were faulty, one of the representatives of the Press being chosen as clerk, the minutes being kept in a penny account-book. Then gin and hot water would be brought in by the beaming, red-faced host, and after the sugar had been judiciously added, and the long clays filled with shag and lighted, the business of the evening invariably commenced by the sexton, who had stood trembling on the mat outside, being called in and roundly abused for his inattention to duty. When this remarkable body did not quarrel with their one single employé, who dug graves and grew mushrooms, they quarrelled among themselves about the disposition of the corpses, or the form and manner of the tombstones, the discussion growing so heated that, on one occasion, the chairman, with an oath, collared one of his fellow-members, who had dared to dispute his ruling, and pitched him headlong downstairs into the bar below.

At command of the irate chairman, the sexton, who acted as 'the Board's' factotum and beadle, followed the expelled member into the street, and offered to fight him on the spot. The unfortunate tailor, who had been badly shaken by his sudden descent, declined this invitation, and limped off, consigning the whole of the enlightened body to the regions of eternal warmth, and threatening that on the morrow he would 'go and wreck the whole bally cemetery.'

Local politics in Hounslow at that period were fiercely contested. Indeed, a few days later, one of the members of the Local Board — the body that controlled the drains,

now happily superseded by the District Council — a retired collector of rabbit-skins, who posed as the people's champion, differed so seriously with the chairman, a birthday knight, upon the appointment of a new inspector of nuisances — whom, by the way, he irreverently termed a 'stink inspector' — that in order to prevent him doing mischief he had to be removed by the police, his books, papers, and rusty tall hat being flung out after him into the road.

Meanwhile, the ill-printed *Hounslow Standard* became locally popular by reason of the brilliance of its descriptions of these exciting events, and thus gradually, by dint of slaving day after day, week after week, only retiring to rest when his aching brain refused longer to bear the strain, and his head fell in sleep upon his blotting-pad, Bertram Rosmead, lonely, pensive, and self-absorbed, began to acquire a knowledge of the first elements of journalism.

CHAPTER VI

ONE FACE

To the journalist, in his youthful enthusiasm, armed with ponderous note-book, generally ready to take an absolutely verbatim note of the merest trivial discussion, and fully believing that any 'original matter' he writes will influence the world's opinion, life is full of variety and pleasure. If his colleagues are good fellows, as Rosmead's were at Hounslow, there is considerable amusement, and work is often reduced to a minimum by one reporter attending a small meeting and furnishing duplicate reports to all his *confrères*. The one idea of the local reporter is to make the greatest amount of 'copy' with the least possible amount of exertion; and after Bertram had occupied the editorial chair of his journal for a year, he found that these carbon duplicates, on oiled tissue paper, known in journalism as 'flimsies,' circulated so freely, that he had plenty of time on his hands. Reporting without labour had been brought to a fine art in that district. Usually, the whole of his afternoons were free; therefore, with a resolve to endeavour to contribute to other periodicals, he one day sat down and wrote some verses which had been running in his head all day. They were in French, for he found he could write French with better rhythm, and he headed them 'Mirette': —

Mirette a des yeux couleur de printemps
 Qui font s'entr'ouvrir les boutons de rose,
 Et l'on dit qu'il naît des lis éclatants
 À la place émue où son pied se pose.

Le front de Mirette est si gracieux,
 Que lorsqu'ils y voient un sourire éclore
 Les oiseaux distraits chantent dans les cieux
 Comme s'ils voyaient resplendir l'aurore.

In this strain he wrote eight verses, all decidedly above the average, as those quoted plainly show, the final one being: —

Puis, quand elle part, sous les bois joyeux
 Qui couvrent de fleurs sa nuque dorée,
 Le prince va boire, en fermant les yeux,
 L'eau pure où brilla l'image adorée.

When he had finished them, with many final touches, he took some ruled paper, made a good copy, and enclosed them in an envelope to the editor of *Temple Bar*. Three days later, he received from the office of that magazine an intimation that his contribution was accepted, and would appear in an early number, while the editor added that he was ready to consider any other similar verses in French. At this, Rosmead's joy knew no bounds.

He had taken his first step on the thorny path of literature, and was now determined to press forward to his goal. Neglecting his journalistic work somewhat — for from the first he looked upon it as a mere stepping-stone to literary life — he sat day after day, night after night, writing poem after poem, but all to no purpose. None that he wrote were of sufficient merit to send in response to the editor's invitation. Therefore, in sheer desperation, he had to fall back upon the madrigal, '*Belle, vous croyez que j'ignore,*' he had read to his fellow-students and to Fosca on that well-remembered Sunday afternoon long ago.

This was accepted, as were others in the months that succeeded, and although published anonymously, the cultured readers of *Temple Bar* did not fail to recognise in them a high standard of attainment.

But Bertram Rosmead was ambitious. The paragraphs he read in every paper about the sayings and doings of prominent novelists—who, in these days, obtain almost as much advertisement as a prince of the royal blood—had aroused within him a determination to take the advice of his old and lost friend Teddy, and try romance.

So, through those dreary winter months, when the evenings were long, he managed to snatch time from his journalistic duties, and toiling ever at his table, strove to write short stories. As is usual with the tyro, he sent them in various directions, always to the editors of the higher-class magazines, the illustrations of which commended themselves to him; but, without exception, they all came back, with a printed form enclosed, expressing the editor's regret. The various forms of refusal are too well known to every author, and there is not one successful writer to-day who does not vividly recollect those disappointing leaflets of the past, or perhaps has some of them still preserved in the locked drawer of his writing-table. But Rosmead's attempts at fiction were very crude, and, although never devoid of literary merit, they lacked that dramatic treatment and delicate touch necessary to render the *feuilleton* attractive. His plots were generally good, but his utter ignorance of *technique* rendered his productions quite useless from an editorial point of view.

Months passed in that manner. Every week he sent out one or more short stories; but the postman brought them back with a regularity that was disheartening. Of his meagre thirty shillings a week, he had not much to spare for postages after he had paid the ascetic widow for

his board and lodging ; therefore, many times he sat in his quiet, lonely room, crushed and despairing, the bitter truth forced upon him that he had no talent, and that the money spent in sending his wretched attempts about was money thrown away.

He admitted to none of his colleagues that he was trying to become a novelist, fearing their derision ; but one day, when one of them, an elderly man, who had spent his life as a pressman, and had risen no higher than local journalism, called at his lodgings to exchange a report, and sat beside his fire smoking a cigarette, he approached the subject of fiction.

‘It’s slow, deadly slow, in this place,’ Rosmead said with a sigh. ‘Life here seems absolutely petrified.’

‘Tired of it — eh ?’ asked the dark-bearded, grave-eyed man, who habitually wore a soft black felt hat and a grey woollen muffler. The local reporter is fond of a literary appearance.

‘No, not tired,’ Rosmead answered. ‘Only I should like to contribute stories to other papers. I believe they pay well for them — don’t they ?’

‘Yes, but it’s few men who can write them,’ his companion answered. ‘I tried myself years ago, and failed. Not a single one was taken, so I gave it up.’

‘Don’t you think that the average man, if he perseveres, can get his stuff taken ?’ Rosmead asked, standing with his back to the fire, his hands in the pockets of his old house-jacket, easy and reminiscent of the Quai Montebello.

‘No,’ answered the journalistic failure, with some bitterness, ‘not unless you know the editors. It’s all by favour nowadays.’

Rosmead was silent, wondering whether this man, who had spent thirty years in and about newspaper offices, spoke the truth. He knew no editor, and, in common with

amateur writers, regarded them with awe, as a sort of superior and distinct species. These emphatic words were terribly disappointing.

But his friend was one of those flabby-hearted, steady plodders with no soul above local journalism, whose ideas are as antiquated as the type from which their journals are printed, and the height of whose ambition is to 'do a bit of lineage,' namely, to supply to the great London morning papers short paragraphs of events of general interest occurring in their locality, the reward for which varies from half-a-crown to five shillings. Every local journalist, from junior reporter to editor, is ready to expound his views on literature in general, and novel-writing in particular, but few know anything at all about it, and their criticisms are mainly adverse, because, though hopelessly devoid of literary talent, they consider themselves quite equal to the men whose names they see appended to the various classes of current fiction.

'Then you think there's no chance for the unknown man?' Rosmead observed, gravely contemplating his cigarette.

'None, my dear fellow, none,' the elder man answered. 'The fiction market is overcrowded. Amateurs write, and write well sometimes, without thought of payment; others are ready to pay for the satisfaction of seeing themselves in print, and in this cascade of fiction pouring into the office of every magazine or paper which publishes stories, editors can fill their columns for nothing if they choose. But why do you ask? Are you thinking of trying the experiment?' he inquired, smiling.

Rosmead hesitated.

'Well, yes,' he admitted. 'But of course you needn't tell anyone. The fellows will only poke fun at me. I've already written one or two things for *Temple Bar*.'

‘For *Temple Bar*?’ cried the other, in surprise, for the fact that the reporter of ‘the rag,’ as the *Hounslow Standard* was usually known among the representatives of the Press, had actually contributed to that magazine at once raised him in the estimation of this disappointed scribe. ‘I see the magazine every month, but have never noticed your name. What sort of stuff do you write for it?’

‘French verses,’ he answered. ‘There are some in the current number,’ and taking the magazine from the table, he opened it, and handed it to his friend.

‘Do you mean to say that you wrote those?’ exclaimed the other. He was used to the boasts of younger journalists, and eyed Rosmead with suspicion.

‘I did,’ the latter answered. Then, noticing the shadow of doubt upon his face, he took from the table a letter he had received from the editor that morning, asking for another contribution. Sight of this was, of course, convincing.

‘Well,’ the journalist said at last, ‘you may write French verses with success, because it’s very few Englishmen who can do it; but fiction is entirely out of the question. Take my advice, and don’t waste your time in endeavouring to accomplish the impossible. Better become a good pressman than a bad novelist. While you’ve got a berth on a paper, you’ve always your weekly screw; not much, perhaps, but it’s sure. As a writer of fiction you might slave for six months and not earn sixpence. No, study the journalistic art more closely; try and put a bit more “guts” into your leaders, and sling in a bit of Latin sometimes. It always impresses your readers, even if you don’t know the translation yourself. Then in a few years you may be able to leave here and get on a decent paper in the provinces, possibly even a daily.’

‘I’d like to be on a London daily,’ observed Rosmead, in all seriousness.

His friend laughed heartily at this artless remark.

‘So would all of us, my dear fellow,’ he said. ‘Eight pounds a week and all expenses. Only fancy! But such a berth isn’t to be dreamed of. No “local man,” in all my long experience, has ever gone straight to a London daily, and every local man who has tried to write novels has ignominiously failed.’

That night, when he returned from attending a stupid amateur entertainment at Twickenham, two miles away, Bertram Rosmead sat alone beside his fire, reflecting deeply. He recollected every word his friend had uttered, and saw how utterly hopeless it was to obtain fame in fiction. As a journalistic plodder, a mere scribbler of reports and commentator on local intelligence, he might, after a few years, join the staff of a better journal with slightly increased salary, and that was the highest level to which he could rise. Like his friend, he must remain and grow old in his groove, for ever scribbling paragraphs anent parish teas and mothers’ meetings, describing sales of work and juvenile junketings, or commenting in highfalutin’ terms upon the latest scheme of sewerage, or the engaging qualities of a ‘departed fellow-townsmen.’

He thought all this over, long and seriously. Once all his hopes had been wrecked, all life crushed from him, by the fickleness of the one woman he adored. His friends here in England knew nothing of it. It was a secret locked within his heart. Often in moments such as these he wondered how Fosca fared, whether Jean, the traitorous, oily-mouthed Frenchman, had already deserted her; whether, as was most probable, she was back again, praying forgiveness of the inebriate Marquis. Then he sighed, and strove to cast her memory from him.

Even Teddy, the faithful, ever-happy Teddy, had gone out of his life, for, after he had left the Quartier to wander,

‘the Bouchon,’ unable to live there alone with the recollection of Violette upon him, had left to study in Florence. He had heard this from a mutual friend to whom he had written, but none, it appeared, knew Teddy’s address. He was no longer a Bohemian, he supposed; no longer one of themselves.

Thoughts of the past possessed him that night as the little clock ticked on in the dead silence, and his lamp spluttered as the oil became exhausted. He pondered sadly upon the discouraging words of the journalist. To write romance was the one absorbing ambition in life, for he had always been essentially a dreamer, and long ago had woven strange, weird plots in his mind after reading the romances of Dumas, Ohnet, Bourget, or Poe.

‘No,’ he cried aloud at last, starting to his feet with sudden decision, and clenching his hands, ‘I won’t be beaten. I’ll try again, and if I fail, I’ll still try, and try, in face of all they say. Their discouragement shall never deter me. I know I had no talent for art, but believe that some day I may be able to write fiction, to intelligibly relate the stories which so often rise involuntarily in my mind. To-morrow I’ll make another start on a short story.’

Four manuscripts were lying upon the table, each having been around to several papers, and each ‘declined with thanks.’ His eyes fell upon them.

‘No good,’ he murmured. ‘I’ll write fresh ones,’ and taking them up, he cast them bodily into the fire. With sadness he watched the flames consume them, for they were the result of many weeks’ toil, of many long nights of brain-racking. It was a sacrifice to burn them, but he was prepared for it, prepared for anything in order to attain his end.

Then, when the flames had died down, he sighed, blew out his lamp, and went to bed.

An incident occurred on the following night, as his paper

was going to press, which opened his eyes regarding the treatment of fiction. For many months an exciting novel had been running serially in the paper, supplied from London in leaden stereotyped columns, but great was the foreman printer's dismay, on making up the paper, to find that although he had two columns of the story, yet there was no instalment for the following week, and it was not concluded. Inquiries were made, and it was discovered that a lad had placed the two final chapters in the melting-pot, in order to manufacture paper-weights.

Rosmead was sitting at midnight at the back of the shop in his mouldy den, which, never having been swept for years, did duty as editorial office, when the foreman burst in, saying, in those sharp, brief tones which every foreman printer uses —

‘No more of that darned yarn. The end’s been melted up.’

Rosmead looked up from reading his proof, inquiringly, and in response to a question, the appalling facts were explained.

‘Well, what are we to do?’ the editor asked, dismayed.

‘Dry it up,’ was the prompt rejoinder.

‘How can you, when nobody in the office has read it? I’ll have a look at it presently.’

‘No, it’s the boss’s orders that the bally sheet goes to press at twelve. There isn’t time for fussing after it,’ the man answered, wiping his hands on his apron.

‘Then what are you going to do?’

‘It’s already done, mister. I’ve comped three lines, married a couple of ’em, and put “The End.” The forme’s locked up, so make your mind easy. We make no difficulties in this office. If the public don’t like it, they must do the other thing.’

And with that he disappeared.

Next morning the readers of the exciting serial in the *Hounslow Standard* were mystified and amazed to find that Lady Geraldine, already a wife, had been abruptly married to a burglar!

In the months that followed, every moment he could snatch from the trudging hither and thither consequent on reporting for his obscure sheet, he spent crouched at his table struggling to write short stories, gradually acquiring a slight stoop, so long and diligently he sat. To the thin-faced relict who administered to his daily wants his studious habits were remarkable. 'My young man never goes out and about o' nights, like other men,' she told her gossiping neighbours of the lodging-letting genus. 'He's poring for ever over 'is writing night after night, till I fully expect he'll have a touch of brain fever. He goes nowhere; scarcely anybody comes to see him except the boy from the office, who brings him printed bits of the newspaper, what he calls proofs. He's well educated, a perfect gentleman, my dear—and of course I knows a gentleman when I sees one; but he's a bit moody like. He used to be merry enough when he first came to me. But now I firmly believe he's got some trouble or other on his mind, poor fellow.'

The 'poor fellow' alluded to certainly had a very serious trouble on his mind. He had written over a dozen stories of various lengths, and had sent them to a wide variety of papers, but fate seemed against him, for not a single one had been found of sufficient merit to be worth publication. In order to pay the postage on these children of his brain, he had been forced to exercise an economy which at first was terrible—namely, he had given up his cigarettes, for the money he spent in them weekly gave him three or even four chances with editors. Therefore, after the first day or so, he gladly faced the difficulty, although it must be added that even then this was in vain, and the stamps he

so hopefully purchased were in every case wasted. There were plain signs, too, that in most instances his manuscripts were never read, and these discouraged him more, perhaps, than any other circumstance. He feared that editors had become tired of the short, polite notes accompanying his screeds, and that being so, he believed his chance of success had vanished for ever.

There is a low tide in the affairs of every struggling literary man when, crushed beneath his ever-recurring disappointments, and disheartened by the futility of his attempts to secure a footing in the profession that it is his aim to join, he is ready to retire from the fray. Bertram Rosmead was no exception. He had, as is usual with the inexperienced writer, tried all the highest class publications without bestowing any thought upon those which cater for the lower classes. No writer is content with beginning with the lowest rung of the ladder. Ill fortune had dogged him so persistently, that at last he was on the point of relinquishing all hope, when one evening, while travelling by train between Twickenham and Hounslow, he picked up part of a paper which had been left in the compartment by some previous traveller. It was a family journal he had never seen before, green-covered, of the shape and style of *Tit-Bits*, published in Glasgow, and entitled *Scottish Nights*. He saw that it contained stories — short stories by persons whose names were unknown — and it occurred to him that, while London editors had conspired against him, country editors might regard his contributions a little more favourably. So he carried home this incomplete journal, and that night selected two of his short stories, which were the most dramatic in his own estimation, and dispatched them to the North.

An anxious week followed, but, sure enough, the postman came one morning and handed in a bulky packet

which he knew too well contained his rejected manuscripts. In despair he tore open the packet, but next second uttered a loud exclamation of amazement, when he discovered that with the manuscript were the proofs, and with the proofs a cheque for two guineas, the first money he had earned by writing fiction.

At last he had taken the first step. He was no longer an amateur, but was paid for his contributions. He had entered the ranks of professional romancers. And he went forth happily, with elastic tread, singing to himself the merry song in the chorus of which he had so often joined at Mother Géry's —

Mimi, Mimi est une blonde,
 Une blonde que l'on connaît;
 Elle n'a qu'une robe au monde,
 Landerirette!
 Et qu'un bonnet.

That day he read the proofs carefully, and returned them with a note to the editor, offering further work. To this came a polite reply, and in a short time the readers of that Scotch weekly periodical knew the name of Bertram Rosmead as a regular contributor of short sensational stories. Those *feuilletons* which had failed to attract the editors of the *World*, *Truth*, or *Vanity Fair*, delighted the readers over the Border, and after some months the editor found his newly-discovered contributor's work so popular, that he expressed his readiness to consider a serial story to run eight or ten weeks, if Mr. Rosmead cared to submit one.

Thus, full of enthusiasm, the editor of the *Hounslow Standard* sat down, and after weeks, nay months, of hard work, completed his first novel. It was, however, a painfully amateurish attempt. The art of writing serial fiction is acquired only by long and diligent practice, therefore there

was little wonder that the editor should return it with a letter of profound regret that the story 'was not of a character to interest his readers.' Truth to tell, it was the crudest sensation possible, with a blundering and impossible love interest, and a *dénouement* which was exposed in the first chapter. Such a piece of work was fit only for one thing — to light the fire with; but the editor had seen that his unknown contributor had a distinct talent for writing *storiottes*, and therefore hesitated to wound his feelings. On the contrary, he wrote a few days later asking for further short stories. Eighteen and sixpence or a guinea was not a very high rate of remuneration for four or five thousand words of fiction, but Rosmead, in the first flush of his success, considered it a very handsome reward, and was more than contented. The refusal of his novel disappointed him bitterly, but having grown callous, regarding failure as the natural outcome of enthusiasm, he cast the manuscript aside, and continued to write the briefer and more crystallised fiction.

Throughout three whole years, long weary years of toil and disappointment, with scarcely a single day's holiday, he worked on, by day scouring his district to pick up local news, and at night slaving beneath his lamp, striving to improve his style, taking as his models the shorter stories of Maupassant, of Montépin, of Pierre Loti, and Zola's inimitable 'Stories for Ninon.' In those idle days beside the Seine, he had read diligently many second-hand French novels purchased from the stalls, and therefore endeavoured to follow the lines of the successful *feuilletonists*. Of English fiction, however, he knew little or nothing.

Gradually he extended his connection. One or two manuscripts, with which he experimented, were accepted by those penny pseudo-Society journals in London which make a point of publishing a short story, and he could not

disguise the fact that he was surely, if slowly, developing into a writer of fiction.

It was at this juncture, when one night, having treated himself to a little mild dissipation in the form of a visit to London, he was passing along Fleet Street, gazing up wistfully at the brilliantly-lighted newspaper offices, and wondering whether some day he, too, might not spend his nights in one of those great establishments, where the work was light and the pay handsome, when suddenly, at the corner of Chancery Lane, a face, passing beneath the electric light, attracted him — a face more pure, more regular in outline than he had ever before witnessed.

The face was the face of a heroine of romance; a trifle pale and wistful, perhaps, but eminently beautiful. Was he not seeking local colour for the romance he intended, ere long, to write; was he not wandering, aimlessly, that night, in the great world of London, seeking material for the book which, some day, would make his name world-famous?

For an instant he hesitated. Then he turned and followed her.

CHAPTER VII

THE STUDENT AND THE SUBJECT

ALONE, she was walking quickly in the direction of Charing Cross, a neat, erect figure in black, a trifle *petite*, but essentially dainty. Already she had gained the Law Courts before he drew up behind her, and then he saw how slim-waisted and neat-attired she was, how gracefully she walked, how well her little black, jet-trimmed bonnet, with its tiny white bird, suited her dark beauty.

Since Fosca had gone out of his life, he had gazed upon no other woman with admiration until that moment. He was not a man to wear his heart on his sleeve. Literature was his mistress, and he cared for little else beside his books and the old littered table whereat he spent the silent watches of the night. He was not one to be easily fascinated by a woman, more especially now that Fosca had shattered all his belief in woman's honesty and affection. Even though studiously polite, and essentially chivalrous, he was inclined to treat the fair sex with calm indifference, and never sought their society. During the past three years, he had lived only with his books, and with that Bohemian instinct, in him inborn, cared for nothing outside the range of his own studies.

He passed her, pretending to hurry on without noticing her, but, nevertheless, casting a covert glance at her face. At that instant, however, she raised her eyes and peered into his, with a glance, half of inquiry, half of annoyance.

She was about twenty-one, as far as he could judge, with a pair of dimpled cheeks, eyes dark and luminous, a small, delicate nose that denoted considerable self-will, and a high brow shaded by a mass of fluffy nut-brown hair. Her black cloth jacket, short and smartly made, fitted her without a crease; her skirt hung straight in graceful folds without dragging at the back, as London skirts will; and pinned to her coquettish little muff of quilted black satin was a bunch of violets.

Her face, among all others, had attracted him, because it was such a face as he had imagined his heroine should possess. He decided to study her character, her virtues, and her weaknesses, and reproduce her in his pages with the fidelity of a photograph from the life.

He raised his hat and spoke to her. It never occurred to him, accustomed as he was to the free manners of the Quai Montebello, that he was doing anything extraordinary in thus accosting her, or seeking to force himself upon her without an introduction. She glanced at him for an instant, in haughty contempt, then lowered her eyes modestly, and slightly quickened her pace. Again he spoke, but without heeding him, she turned almost at right angles and crossed the road. Undaunted by this rebuff, he followed her, and a few minutes later, advancing again to her side, expressed a hope that he had caused her no annoyance.

‘Your persistence does annoy me,’ she answered briefly, glancing severely at him.

‘Then I trust that you will forgive me,’ he said, with politeness.

‘Forgiveness is quite unnecessary,’ she replied, once again looking into his face.

‘I recognise that I am speaking with a lady,’ he observed. ‘I trust you will allow me to treat you as such.’

‘Well? What do you want?’ she asked, the shadow

of annoyance fading from her face, a fact which showed him that, like every other woman, she was a trifle vain of her appearance and amenable to flattery.

‘I am alone,’ he responded, with a boldness which surprised her. ‘I want your companionship, if you will grant me that favour. You, too, are alone. Is there any reason why we should not spend an hour or so in each other’s society?’

She regarded him calmly, and saw that he was tall, dark, and good-looking, beyond the average run of the men who endeavoured to force themselves upon her, and although not very well dressed, perhaps, — for he wore a thin silver watch-guard, the essence of bad taste in man’s attire, — yet there was about his rather long hair and carelessly-tied cravat a dash of the easy-going, good-for-nothing which commended itself to her.

Their eyes met. He laughed, and next instant had won her consent.

Along the Strand, across Trafalgar Square, and up Pall Mall he strolled at her side, chatting affably, and discussing commonplaces, noting with minuteness her manner and her speech, and gauging her character from her expressed pleasures and dislikes.

Although so well and neatly dressed, it was apparent, ere she had spoken half-a-dozen words, that she was not a lady. Her grammar was very faulty; she spoke with a drawl that showed her to be an unmistakable Cockney, using such words as ‘chimbley’ for chimney, ‘skillington’ for skeleton, and referring to gentlemen of her acquaintance as ‘fellows.’ Her name, she told him, was Lena Loder.

‘And may I write and see you again?’ he asked, when, after reaching Piccadilly, they had again retraced their steps to Charing Cross station, where she said she must leave him. ‘I’ve enjoyed this little chat immensely, and I hope I haven’t bored you too much.’

‘No, not at all,’ she declared; nevertheless it was evident she was in a hurry to escape from him.

‘Then to where may I address the letter?’ he asked.

She hesitated. As yet she was undecided whether she really liked him.

‘Well,’ she said at last, ‘if you really would like to see me again, write to me at the Adelphi Theatre.’

‘The Adelphi!’ he cried, surprised. ‘Then you are an actress?’

‘Yes,’ she laughed, ‘I’m on the stage.’

He regarded her curiously. For the past hour he had been inwardly congratulating himself upon his ability to read her character as easily as though it were an open book. He had imagined her to be the daughter of some small tradesman, or perhaps a ‘show-room’ hand at one of the Oxford Street drapery establishments, for she had spoken with all the slang used by young ladies of that class, who are fond of talking of their ‘fellows,’ of their Sunday trips to Richmond or Hampton Court, or of their visits to the Oxford, the Royal, or the Alhambra on winter nights. The craze for the cinderella, too, — for every large drapery house now has its cinderella dances, — is one of the outward and visible signs of the modern shop-girl; though it must be said that hearts as brave and tender beat beneath the cotton corsets of the counter-slave as beneath the long-waisted, Paris-made satin ones of the lady of Mayfair. Lena had expressed her fondness for cinderellas, and the student of character had been misled by this and other statements into a belief that her calling was the same as Fosca’s had been.

‘I’m really surprised to know you’re an actress,’ he said.

‘I know several actresses, — French ones, — but they’re not at all like you.’

‘But I’m English,’ she laughed. ‘I suppose that’s the

difference. I've been in the "Arbour Lights" ever since the first night — a year and a half ago now.'

'But the theatre is open to-night, and you're not there!' he exclaimed, puzzled.

'I'm due now,' she answered hurriedly. 'So I must go. Good-bye. Then you'll write — eh?'

'Yes,' he answered, lifting his hat, as he grasped her small hand. 'I'll write in a day or two, and we will have another walk. Good-bye.'

She laughed gaily, and next moment was lost in the hurrying crowd.

As he walked across Hungerford foot-bridge to Waterloo Station to take his train back to dreary, suburban Hounslow, he laughed aloud at his little adventure. He was not enamoured of her in the slightest degree. True, her face was beautiful, but her beauty was more that of a brown-haired, waxen doll than of a woman, and her painful ignorance of one or two subjects he had broached jarred upon his highly sensitive nature. A dry, supercilious laugh escaped him when he reflected upon the sole reason which had prompted him to approach her, and the result of his observations. She was wild, unsympathetic, uneducated, with no soul above the cinderella or the theatre; she loved London, revelled in its ceaseless turmoil, and hated the country, because, as she declared, its dulness bored her to death. He had, on first sight of her, imagined her as a heroine. How mistaken sometimes are our first impressions!

That night he went home with a feeling that his evening had been distinctly wasted. He had studied a woman's character, and only found what had irritated and disgusted him. He compared her with Fosca, the vivacious, neat-ankled, hoydenish, but, nevertheless, educated and refined Fosca, that child of Bohemia he had loved so tenderly. The comparison was hideous. This little Lena, who acted

in the 'Arbour Lights' was, from every point of view, odious. He resolved not to see her again.

His first experiment in the study of character had certainly not been a success.

Lying on his table, he found a letter from a magazine editor, asking for another of his French poems, and that night, before retiring to rest, he sat with his feet on the fender, and wrote the following in pencil, in imitation of Musset: —

Beau chevalier qui partez pour la guerre,
Qu'allez-vous faire
Si loin d'ici ?

Voyez-vous pas que la nuit est profonde
Et que le monde
N'est que souci ?

Vous qui croyez qu'une amour délaissée
De la pensée
S'enfuit ainsi,
Hélas! hélas! chercheurs de renommée,
Votre fumée
S'envole aussi.

Beau chevalier qui partez pour la guerre,
Qu'allez-vous faire
Si loin de nous ?
J'en vais pleurer, moi qui me laissais dire
Que mon sourire
Était si doux.

In the days that followed, he found himself thinking a good deal of Lena, not because he had been attracted by her pretty face, nor by any good quality she possessed, but simply because he believed that, as a character in his book, she might be useful after all. There was something about her that was uncommon, although he was unable to accurately define it. Thus he became interested in her.

Therefore, after some deliberation, he wrote, met her one Sunday afternoon, strolled with her across Kensington Gardens, and again placed her on the dissecting table, with the same disappointing results as before.

On every subject but one she spoke freely. She avoided all reference to the theatre.

He found her merry and amusing enough, even though the ignorance she betrayed caused him numberless twinges, and later, when he took her to supper at the Café Monico, that garish restaurant, so popular among shop-assistants and foreign clerks on Sunday evenings, he found she was evidently no stranger there.

On several other occasions they met and went for long walks together. Sometimes he would afterwards reproach himself for thus wasting his time; for he had been one evening secretly to the Adelphi, and had there seen his little friend. She had, he discovered, but a thinking part, forming one of a crowd of fisher-girls, her chief work being to carry a basket, and shade her eyes with her hands, as if watching for the return of the fishing-smack supposed to be having a rough time of it somewhere on the painted backcloth. Such duties were certainly not arduous. She was 'on the stage,' and that was about all.

Unaware that he had seen her across the footlights, she one evening, in response to his questions, told him about herself. It was a sad story, and as she related it, he saw how her gaiety faded. She was, it appeared, the daughter of an artist, once well known and prosperous; but who, through drink, had been ruined, and had died fifteen years before from injuries received in a street accident while intoxicated. Her mother had been left alone, without resources, with four children, all girls, dependent upon her, and in order to support them had been compelled to clean chambers and act as 'laundress' to gentlemen in the Tem-

ple. Of her sisters, one had married a worthless, drunken scamp, who now starved his wife and existed in the direst poverty, while the other, who had always been weak and ailing, had now been bedridden for the past three years, suffering from consumption in complication with other diseases. Lena alone worked, and her salary of eighteen shillings a week, together with what her mother, aged seventy, earned by 'doing for' a barrister in the Temple, just sufficed to keep a home over their heads.

She told her wretched story simply, sighing when she mentioned her mother, and speaking in confidence to Rosmead, as if she had known him all her life. If the truth were told, she liked him for his easy-going disposition, and her estimate of him was considerably increased by the sympathy he now expressed with her.

'Then you live close by the theatre, I suppose?' he remarked.

'Not very far off. Our neighbourhood isn't a very salubrious one,' she laughed sadly. 'We live in Gough Square, at the back of Fleet Street. Mother has lived there for twenty years.'

'Gough Square!' he exclaimed, surprised. He knew the spot, a small paved square, approached by one of the dark, narrow courts off Fleet Street, and surrounded by great printing establishments, book-binders, paper warehouses, type-founders, and kindred trades. The trees under which Dr. Johnson loved to walk have disappeared long ago. In that vicinity there were no residents, the old, red, dirt-grimed houses, of notable proportions a century ago, being now let out as offices to engravers, agents, and unimportant journals, for it was the very heart of newspaper London, hemmed in on every side by great, high buildings, excluding light and air. Truly it was not by any means a salubrious spot, the atmosphere thick with the soot of a

myriad chimneys, and the odour of printing ink, and crowded at mid-day with 'comps.' and apprentices, who smoked, swore, and idled away their dinner hour. In these meagre, sordid, unhealthy surroundings, Lena had been bred and born. Was it, then, any wonder that her growth should be stunted, her limbs thin and fragile, or her speech should savour of the dialect of Farringdon Market; that she forgot to aspirate her 'h's,' or that her education had progressed no further than what had been imparted to her at the Board School round in Fetter Lane?

Rosmead felt deeply touched. It was evident, however, that she liked the stage, for she presently related with pride how, for five years running, she had been engaged by Augustus Harris as one of the chorus in the Drury Lane pantomime, of the amusing incidents which so often occurred 'behind,' of the beauty of the dresses, and the revels on Twelfth Night, when the Baddeley cake was cut. Nevertheless, underlying this superficial gaiety was a heart overburdened with sorrow, a brave little heart, which struggled on to assist her mother, and to provide necessities for her invalid sister.

Soon the pair became fast friends, and once or twice, at Rosmead's invitation, she travelled down to Hounslow, arriving at mid-day, eating a homely chop with him, and then walking along the picturesque winding road past Kneller Hall to Twickenham, or across the bare brown fields to old-world Isleworth, that quiet, peaceful village by the river side. They would return to his lodgings for tea, and then she would catch her train back to town in time for the theatre, having, as she would afterwards relate to the other girls in the dressing-room, spent 'a day in the country.'

Two, or even three times each week they met, either in London or at Hounslow, and he found himself neglecting

his work sadly. He did not love her, did not even admire her, except for her honest, valiant efforts to support her mother's dingy home; yet he found her very amusing, with her bright chatter of the theatrical world, a world unknown to him.

At last, one day in January, when they had been acquainted nearly two months, and she was sitting beside his fire drinking her tea prior to returning to Waterloo, she looked at him gravely for a few moments, and then suddenly burst into tears.

He jumped up, and taking both her hands in his, asked what ailed her.

At first she would not answer; but at length, after many repeated inquiries, she faltered, raising her tear-stained eyes to his —

‘I’m very, very unhappy. Forgive me for making a fool of myself.’

‘Unhappy! Why?’

‘I’m going to leave home,’ she answered briefly.

‘Why? What has occurred?’ he asked. He knew nothing of her home, having only seen its exterior, one of the grimmest of all in that decayed little square.

‘It’s impossible to live there any longer,’ she said. ‘I do my best, yet nobody is satisfied. My step-sister is always creating discord and making my life unbearable.’

‘Your step-sister? Who is she? You’ve never told me of her before,’ he said.

‘My mother married twice,’ Lena explained, ‘and my step-sister lives with us. She’s thirty-five, and earns a little over at Spottiswoode’s at the bookbinding. But her temper’s unbearable. She’s everlastingly nagging at poor mother and me, and then Mary has the fits come on her. I can’t stand it any longer. I’ve done my best, Heaven knows.’

‘Yes,’ he replied sympathetically, ‘I believe you have, little one. It’s a shame, a great shame, that they should treat you so. But if I were you, I’d bear up. Don’t show that these words of your step-sister annoy you.’

‘No,’ she said decisively. ‘I’ve threatened to go lots of times, and I now mean it. They’ve driven me from home.’

‘But where will you go?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Have you no friends with whom you can live?’

‘No, none,’ she replied, shaking her head sorrowfully. ‘Girls like me don’t have many friends. Everybody looks upon the stage with suspicion.’

He sighed. What she said was quite correct. The standard of morality among female supernumeraries at theatres is not calculated to inspire confidence in respectable females of that genus known as ‘motherly.’ No, it was not surprising that Lena was friendless.

That night, after she had left him, he sat with his chin resting upon his hand. Her sorrow had secured his sympathy, for impressionable, tender-hearted, and ever ready to render assistance to those in need, although he was often in sore straits himself, he could not bear to see her treated in this fashion. Perhaps her work was not really hard at the theatre, but it was work surrounded by pitfalls; work amid a crowd of women whose standard was little better than those painted daughters of the pavement who trailed their skirts up and down the ever-busy Strand; work that dulled all sense of refinement, and that took her home at midnight, alone, unprotected, and exposed to all kinds of insults.

Yes, his first estimate of her had been premature and ill-judged. He had seen her through spectacles of cynicism, and the vista had been a distorted one. Now he looked upon her as her true self — an honest, hard-working, self-

denying girl of the people, fitted in every way to become his heroine.

But she intended to leave home and go and live among strangers. Eighteen shillings a week would not keep her respectably and pay for her lodgings. If she left home, then the inevitable would result — it must result. He shuddered to think of it.

Again the dark, handsome face and sparkling eyes of Fosca arose before him, but with a cry of anger he cast aside the remembrance, and thought of Lena, the brave little woman who had sat there in his chair, and unbosomed to him the cause of her unhappiness.

He was silent and thoughtful a long time, reviewing his own position and hers. Then at last he rose, with sudden, chivalrous resolve. He did not love her; he could never love her. It was sheer madness, he knew. The old adage said that pity was akin to love. Well, he pitied her. She was in peril, and he would save her from ruin.

He seated himself at his table and wrote her a long letter, explaining his position plainly and honestly, and asking her to meet him in London next afternoon.

They met, and before they parted Lena Loder, the walking lady in the 'Arbour Lights,' had promised to become the wife of Bertram Rosmead, journalist.

CHAPTER VIII

GREY DAYS

LENA's marriage was not longed~~d~~ delayed. She packed a trunk a week later and left home, telling her mother she could not remain there any longer on account of Annie's continual ill-temper. An hour later she met Bertram at Ludgate Hill station, and drove with him to the registry office in the Blackfriars Road, where they were made man and wife, two cabmen acting as witnesses, and receiving five shillings as their reward.

Three days were spent at Brighton, the longest absence he could take from his journalistic duties; then they returned to Hounslow, taking up their quarters in two furnished rooms in a tiny cottage, one of a row inhabited mostly by railway porters and employés at the neighbouring gunpowder-mills. Bertram's salary as editor was still, as it had been from the first, thirty shillings weekly, an application for a rise having met with a distinct and firm refusal, and this combined with his average earnings from his Scotch paper amounted to about two pounds weekly, a sum which certainly did not admit of many luxuries. In order, however, to further increase their slender income, Lena decided to retain her engagement at the theatre, pointing out that, even if she spent seven shillings a week in railway fares to and from Waterloo, and expended threepence a night on her supper of that high-smelling, oleaginous delicacy dear to the palate of every chorus girl, fried fish, she would still earn nine and sixpence a week, which would be a great help to them.

She was a thrifty little woman, so, stifling the feelings of misgiving that arose within him at thought of her being compelled to return alone long past midnight, he allowed her to have her own way and retain her 'thinking part' in Mr. Sims's popular drama. She was filled with gratitude towards him for having taken her from her uncongenial home, and, by reason of that, exhibited towards him some show of affection, but before many weeks had passed, the ghastly truth was forced upon him that he did not and could not love her.

His marriage had been a foolish, romantic affair, brought about entirely by her affectation of unhappiness. Her conversation, vulgar and uneducated, jarred always upon him; she was fond of the slang of the dressing-room, and almost before the novelty of marriage wore off, began to tire of her quiet daily life at Hounslow and look forward nightly to her journey to London. In the daytime his duties took him out a great deal, and she was thrown upon the society of the landlady, the wife of a man who was absent all the week, being an omnibus-conductor in London, while in the evening, as soon as Bertram came home, it was time for her to catch her train to Waterloo.

Rosmead, sensitive, good-hearted, easy-going fellow that he was, could not close his eyes to the one glaring fact that he had made a terrible mistake — an error that he feared might cost him his future. He had, out of sheer kindness of heart, allied himself with this vain, feather-brained little *figurante*, and gradually found himself detesting the sight of her. At night, when she was absent, he strove hard at his table, as he had done in his bachelor days, writing short stories, a rondeau or two, a few sonnets, and a *chanson* in imitation of ' *Lorsque la Coquette Espérance*' of his master, Musset. Success, however, came very slowly. Not one quarter he wrote could he dispose

of, and often, when alone, he felt inclined to abandon all thought of ever earning a living wage at anything else but journalism.

As summer came and went, he saw plainly that Lena was dissatisfied. She had told him how more than one of 'the girls' at the theatre lived in snug little flats, and how one came every night in her brougham, and it occurred to him that she was thinking that such a life was preferable to being the wife of a slave of the lamp. Yet with calm philosophy he smothered his feelings, and outwardly exhibited no sign of disappointment, annoyance, or bitterness of heart. Towards her he was just as affectionate, just as tender, as he had ever been, for he had taken a step blindly and foolishly, and the consequences were upon his own head, to bear them lightly or heavily, just as he chose. He struggled hard to bear them lightly, but it cost him many hours of serious thought as he trudged over those flat, dusty roads to Feltham, to Twickenham, or to Isleworth in search of news, and it was not long before his brother journalists, all of whom had been introduced to Lena, shrewdly guessed the truth. In desperation he worked at night, never resting, even on Sundays, ever struggling to gain a foothold in the profession that would take him out of that dull, dreary round, yet always failing, until his forehead became lined, and his brave, honest heart callous and world-weary.

One day in late autumn, however, Lena openly declared her disgust with her life and surroundings. She was sitting in their tiny living-room, with its cheap suite covered with red velvet, that bore so unmistakably the stamp of the shop where weekly payments were taken, and having finished her tea, prior to leaving for the theatre, was gazing thoughtfully into the fire.

'I'm sick of this confounded hole,' she said, pouting.

‘It’s simply disgusting. Nothing to see, and nowhere to go. In London you can take a ride on a ’bus; but here, when you go out, you only have lonely country roads. It’s horrible.’

‘Ah!’ he said, sighing, ‘I am sorry, dear, deeply sorry, that it is impossible for me to live in London. My work lies here, you know.’

‘But you’re always stuck over your table, slaving away, puzzling your brain, and earning nothing,’ she observed.

Her words stung him to the quick. It was true he had striven hard, denying himself any hours of recreation, denying her the hours he might have devoted to her entertainment, with one object in view, — namely, to earn sufficient to avoid the necessity of her having to go to London each night in all weathers to gain the modest sum of nine and sixpence weekly. He had tried, yet failure still dogged his footsteps. He was still unknown, still among the Great Unpublished.

‘I have done my best,’ he answered, simply and quietly.

‘It’s a poor look out for us, I’m thinking,’ she said bluntly. ‘If writing don’t pay, then why don’t you take to something else? Of late you seem to be getting quite the old man.’

‘I know it,’ he answered, striving to stifle the sigh which escaped him. He was working against fearful odds, and these cruel words of hers disheartened him. ‘If I could only get one book taken, I might then be able to move out of this place; but at present I have no real success — none. One or two of my stories and a few verses have appeared in the magazines, but all anonymously. Therefore I’m still unknown.’

‘Name is everything nowadays, I suppose,’ she said reflectively. ‘It must be, judging from the dreadful rot one reads by well-known people in the Sunday papers.’

He reflected that what she vulgarly denounced as 'rot' was often the finest and most finished fiction. She appreciated a *Family Herald* supplement; but one day when she had taken up Zola's 'Stories for Ninon,' she had quickly flung it aside as stupid and uninteresting.

'I'm trying to make a name,' he said, swallowing the resentment that arose within him, and speaking tenderly, but with a voice that trembled. 'Everyone at first must have their share of disappointments.'

'And you're having the pretty full share of yours,' she smiled rather cynically. 'I really can't see the use of making your life a burden and slaving away like this for nothing. Surely a couple of years of trying to get on has shown you that it's hopeless. To my mind, you're only wasting time.'

'Then you think that I shall never be successful?' he asked gravely.

'It isn't possible, buried as you are down in this hole,' she declared. 'To get your things taken you must be on the spot, and know the people. You'll never be known while you stick down here on this rag of a paper.'

He bit his lip.

'I shall make a change as soon as I can,' he said. 'At present I know of no opening elsewhere.'

'Well, I hope we'll get away from here very soon, for I'm utterly sick of this dreary life,' she said, and a moment later she left him to put on her jacket and hat.

When she had hurried out to catch her train, he stood for a long time in the same attitude in which she had left him. He had hampered himself with her, a vain, coquettish, brainless girl of the people, the very last woman fitted to become the wife of a man of his culture and refinement. Yet he had not complained, even though the ghastly truth had been forced daily upon him. His marriage had been

a wretched, dismal failure, but, with the instinct of the Bohemian, he merely shrugged his shoulders and let it pass. To be a true Bohemian one must have no sorrows, no regrets; one must live in the present, and allow the past and the future to take care of themselves. Her discontent, and her doubt in his abilities, discouraged him more than any other adverse circumstance. He was downcast, unmanned, soul-sick.

Lena had taken an earlier train to town than usual, on pretence that she wanted to purchase something before going to the theatre, but really because she was anxious to get into that movement and bustle which was to her her very life. On arrival at Waterloo, she found she had yet two hours to spare before being due at the theatre, therefore she took an omnibus to Fleet Street to visit her mother.

Her home was indeed a comfortless, meagre one. When she entered the single back room in which she had spent nearly the whole of her life, she found her mother, a small, stunted old lady in shabby black, her hair still dark, notwithstanding her age, seated on a rickety chair by the fire, while at the further end stood the bed on which lay her invalid sister, moaning and coughing, with another smaller couch close by it. The carpet had long ago lost all traces of pattern, the old mahogany chest of drawers was of a style in vogue a century ago, chipped and broken, and upon that antiquated article of furniture stood a couple of shell-covered boxes, a stand of wool abominations supposed to represent flowers, and a large family Bible, while the square table in the centre, rickety as was the other furniture, was covered with a piece of brown American cloth. A piece of string, stretched across the apartment from end to end, showed that sometimes clothes were hung there to dry, and the room smelt strongly of the pair of kippers which mother and daughter had eaten for their tea. The poor girl upon

the bed, wan, white-faced, and haggard from years of suffering, tossed restlessly, murmuring some words, while her mother sat motionless, staring into the small, cheerless fire.

Suddenly Lena burst into the room, greeting them both with scant courtesy, and, without inquiring after her sister's health, threw down her umbrella, drew a chair to the fire and grumbled that it gave forth no warmth. Long ago she had returned to her mother and confessed that she had married; but she seldom visited them now, because, as she had declared to her husband, they continually wanted money out of her. Her invalid sister was always in need of something, and she, now that she had left home, begrudged every penny she gave her. It was a sad home, that of Mrs. Loder. She was a God-fearing, patient woman, who had been well brought up, and who for years had striven and sacrificed herself for her children, until age had compelled her to relinquish all her work, save one set of chambers in Fig Tree Court. She had never seen Bertram Rosmead, because Lena had felt no inclination to bring her husband to that wretched, single, close-smelling room, but she had formed an opinion that he must be an upright man, and always expressed a hope that her daughter was happy.

'No, I'm not happy,' Lena declared, in answer to her mother's usual question.

'What?' Mrs. Loder asked, surprised. 'Have you quarrelled, then?'

'No, not exactly quarrelled,' her daughter answered. 'But I've expressed my opinion pretty straight upon that wretched hole, Hounslow, and if he doesn't like it, well, he must lump it. That's all.'

'It's the country, and much healthier there than here,' observed her sister, in a weak voice.

'Shut up,' cried Lena. 'You know nothing about it,

and there's no necessity for you to interfere with my affairs. Look after your own.'

'Lena! Lena!' her mother remonstrated, 'why do you come here and create discord when you know poor Mary is so ill?'

'Then she shouldn't interfere,' Lena answered indignantly.

'But I won't allow you to speak like that,' Mrs. Loder said, sharply. 'If you've had a quarrel with your husband, it's no reason why you should come here, give vent to your feelings, and upset us. Husband and wife should settle their differences themselves.'

'Ah!' cried Lena, angrily, 'I see I get no sympathy here. It's because I give you no money now, I suppose. If I had married a rich man, you'd have been all smiles, and I should have been the best girl in the world; but because I'm poor, you don't want to see me.'

'Lena! Lena!' cried her mother, reproachfully.

But Rosmead's wife snatched up her umbrella, and, without further word, flounced from the room.

When she had gone, Mary turned restlessly upon her couch, and, sighing, said —

'Lena always had a temper; but since her marriage, she seems to have become unbearable.'

'Yes, dear,' her mother answered quietly, resuming her seat by the meagre fire. 'She's cruel to speak like that after the years I have toiled for you all since your poor father's death. When he died I had no friend to give me a helping hand, and ever since that day I have been face to face with poverty.'

'Well, never mind, mother,' Mary said cheerfully. 'Don't think of it. It's useless for you to worry yourself for nothing.'

But Mrs. Loder only sighed.

Meanwhile Lena made her way through Fetter Lane into Holborn, and thence to Staple Inn, that small, old-world square of quaint, ancient houses, approached by a narrow court off the busy main thoroughfare. It has not the high repute of the Temple, Lincoln or Gray's Inn, its residents being a motley assortment of journalists, book-makers, outside stockbrokers and bankers' clerks, but it is nevertheless a quiet and convenient spot, preferable to the gloom of Bloomsbury — or Gloombsury, as that faded quarter might justly be termed.

Up the unlighted wooden stairway of one of the oldest of these houses Lena made her way, with a certainty of tread which betrayed that she was no stranger to the place, and stopping before a door on the top floor, which bore in white letters the name 'Sir Douglas Vizard,' rang the bell.

There was the sound of a door banged to, a shuffling of feet, and then she was suddenly confronted by a short, stout man of about sixty, florid-faced, with grey side-whiskers, who held a cheap paraffin lamp in his hand.

'Well, who are you staring at, silly?' Lena asked, laughing at his look of inquiry.

'Lena!' he cried gaily next instant. 'Come in, come in. I really didn't recognise you in the dark.'

And shuffling in his slippers, he led her into the small, old-fashioned, musty sitting-room, where she threw herself into an easy chair with the air of one perfectly at home, and leaning back, laughed merrily.

'Wherever have you been?' he asked, sinking into a seat opposite her. 'You've not called for months.'

'I've been away in the country,' she answered vaguely, with a faint smile.

'Alone?' he inquired, with a meaning leer. He was a gross, showy, over-dressed man, who wore large rings on

his fat hands, a heavy gold albert, and a great single paste diamond in his shirt-front. This external exhibition of wealth impressed people in the City, for if the truth be told, the baronet was not very wealthy, and allowed his name to appear as director of certain companies and pocketed fees ranging from the nimble half-sovereign to the crisp and respectable five-pound note. His life had been full of ups and downs ever since he had inherited the empty title, but out of the latter he had managed to make a very comfortable income by imposing on the credulity of others, allowing no corner to his conscience, and acting with a boldness that was incredible. On his own account he had started one company which existed wholly in his imagination, but it brought him in sufficient to keep him in comparative luxury, to pay his subscription at the Constitutional Club, and otherwise to 'keep him on his legs.'

Among the class to which Lena belonged Sir Douglas was well known, for he had been for years a patron of the theatres and music-halls, and had a fatherly habit of addressing all the girls as 'my dear.' To Lena he was evidently no stranger, for after she had been chatting with him for some time, she rose, and, without invitation, took a bottle of port and two glasses from the cupboard, carried them to the table, and observing that he was not so courteous towards her as he used to be, exclaimed —

'Ere's luck,' and tossed off her wine at a single gulp.

'Then you're not at the theatre now — eh?' Vizard said, in a wheezy voice, with his stereotyped smile, glancing at her wrist, and noticing that she still wore the cheap gold bangle he had given her two years ago.

'Oh, yes, I am,' she answered. 'I've been living in the country and coming to town every night.'

'Quite the leading lady,' he observed, smiling. 'I

haven't been to the Adelphi for an age. I can't stand melodrama at any price.'

'That's the reason why I've come to look you up. We all thought you were dead, and I've got the fair hump of things in general.'

'Then you'll find I'm very much alive,' he answered, jumping up nimbly and crossing to her. 'Come give me a kiss, like a good little girl,' and he put his arm around her waist, and bent his gross, red face to hers.

His touch brought back to her in an instant the recollection of Rosmead, of her husband's calm patience, and of how deeply she had wronged him.

'No,' she cried with sudden resolve, springing to her feet. 'No. Don't touch me.'

'Why?' he demanded in amused surprise.

'Because — because I am married.'

He regarded her in silence for a moment, then burst out laughing.

CHAPTER IX

THE MILLSTONE

A FEW weeks after Lena's open expressions of disgust at her surroundings, Bertram one morning received a letter which caused him boundless delight. It was from the O'Donovan, the lazy, laughing Teddy, whom everybody at Julien's had known as 'The Bouchon,' upon whose mouth had always been the ready question in the slang of the Quartier Latin, '*En sechez-vous un?*'¹ and whose love had met with such a sudden, tragic, and mysterious end. He had, it appeared, seen some anonymous French verses in *Temple Bar*, and recognising them as having been written by his friend when they were living together, had communicated with the editor, and the latter had forwarded his note.

It was an urgent request that Bertram should come and see him, therefore that afternoon he took train to Kensington, where he found his old friend installed in a handsome studio in Hornton Street, close to the High Street railway station. 'The Grey House,' as it was called, was a strangely-built Gothic residence of grey stone, presenting a rather severe, even ecclesiastical appearance, but inside it was furnished richly with artistic taste, a dining-room in old oak, a pretty drawing-room with fine Turkey carpet and rosewood furniture and white enamelled cosy-corners, while upstairs, occupying the whole of the area of the house,

¹ '*Prenez-vous un bock?*'

was a great, high-roofed studio, with huge windows, grand piano, Eastern rugs, stands of armour, and a Moorish alcove draped with silken embroideries, forming a canopy supported by Arab spears.

As the neat maid-servant ushered him in, he looked around the place in amazement. Truly, it was a luxurious place, and Teddy must have made enormous strides to be possessor of such an art collection.

‘What, ho, old chap!’ shouted the O’Donovan, gaily, emerging from behind the easel, and giving his old friend a hearty hand-grip. ‘So at last I’ve found you. Manton, bring some whiskey and soda, and I’m out if anybody calls,’ he added, addressing the maid in the same breath.

The girl withdrew, and the two men walked together across to the fire.

‘Well, and how’s the world been using you?’ the artist inquired, tossing his pallet and brushes aside. The model, a girl, whose neck and shoulders he had been painting, had slipped away into the tiny dressing-room at the end, and the two men were alone.

‘Oh! I suppose I mustn’t complain,’ Rosmead answered, smiling rather bitterly.

‘Not too well — eh?’ his keen-eyed friend observed. ‘So you’ve taken to literature after your walking tour to the devil. Why did you leave Paris like that?’

‘You needn’t ask. You know the reason.’

‘Yes,’ O’Donovan sighed. ‘She was a heartless little cat to treat you so. And I never thought it of Jean — never.’

‘No, no,’ cried Rosmead, quickly. ‘Don’t talk of it now. It’s all passed, and I have ceased to remember.’

‘Ceased to remember!’ the artist repeated slowly. ‘I wish I, too, could forget, old fellow,’ and he sighed.

‘Marry, and then you’ll forget,’ the journalist suggested.

‘What, are you married?’ Teddy asked, surprised.

‘Yes,’ he answered. ‘Why not? Is it such an extraordinary occurrence for a man to marry?’

‘Married, and taken to literature,’ observed the artist.

‘No,’ his friend said, correcting him. ‘I’ve taken to journalism, and hold a rather low-down position — with my usual ill-luck. I’m editor of the *Hounslow Standard*.’

‘A local rag — I beg its pardon — one of those which report mothers’ meetings and big gooseberries — eh?’

‘Yes,’ laughed the friend of his student days. ‘When I returned to London I tried to get into literature by becoming a journalist. I took my first step, and have stuck there ever since.’

‘And you are married. Who’s your wife?’

‘She’s at the Adelphi Theatre — got a little part there.’

‘What’s her name? Is it on the bills?’

‘No,’ he answered hesitatingly. ‘Her name is Lena Loder.’

‘Lena Loder,’ he gasped, glaring in amazement for a moment at his friend; then, as if recovering himself, he turned to the little Turkish coffee-stool upon which the maid had placed the tray, saying: ‘Have a whiskey, old chap,’ and busied himself in mixing it. Rosmead had not noticed the artist’s sudden change of manner when he had mentioned his marriage, and when they had drunk to each other, the O’Donovan again returned to the subject of literature.

‘I remember in the old days,’ he said, ‘it used to be your ambition to write fiction. Have you done any?’

‘Lots, but I haven’t yet succeeded,’ the other answered. ‘What has been published has appeared in unknown papers, and I’m still without name; therefore, without fortune. But you — how long have you been in London?’

‘Nearly two years now,’ Teddy replied. ‘I worked pretty hard in Florence and Rome, then came here, and

found that my Academy pictures had already made me known. I do a good many portraits of well-known people, so I'm compelled to work in this museum. The fashionable women who come here have an absurd idea that an artist's studio should be a sort of combined curiosity-shop and furniture show-room, so I screwed the gov'nor up to shelling out for the place, and here it is. What do you think of it?'

'Beautiful,' the journalist declared, in admiration, comparing the meagre sitting-room in which he worked with this fine apartment, where nothing was inharmonious, nothing wanting. 'It's an ideal studio; the sort of room one reads about in the pages of "Ouida."'

'Yes,' its owner sighed. 'For me it's far too elegant; I much prefer a plain room, where I can wear slippers and an old coat; a studio like ours on the Quai. By Jove! those were happy days, Rosmead, old chap—ah! happy before that wretched tragedy which wrecked my life.'

'You've discovered nothing, I suppose?' inquired the journalist, in a tone of sympathy.

'Absolutely nothing,' he answered bitterly. 'The police could find no clue whatever to her identity. Who she was will now ever remain a mystery.'

Cut off from artistic life as Rosmead had been by burial in that dreary suburban town, he knew nothing of his friend's recent successes, of the notable picture of a well-known society woman in last year's Academy, which had given him such fame as a portrait-painter, or that he was now one of the lions of the season. He glanced at the mantelshelf and saw, stuck in the frame of the mirror, cards for all sorts of society junketings; but it was not until he had made a tour of the studio and inspected some of his friend's recent works that he realised how great was the stride he had made.

Upon one easel was a life-sized portrait, three-quarter length, of a thin-featured, rather ugly, but nevertheless striking woman, in black. All the character in the face had been brought out in lifelike detail, and although the dress was unrelieved by colour, the portrait showed genius that was unmistakable. In reply to Bertram's question, his friend mentioned the lady's name, a name which he knew by repute as that of the foremost among women novelists. 'And this,' continued O'Donovan, turning an unfinished canvas which had its face to the wall. 'This is Lady Elvaston, wife of Sir Charles Elvaston, the proprietor of the *Evening Telegraph*. That's the kind of paper you ought to be on,' he added.

'Ah! I only wish I could get on it; I should then be able to make progress. As it is, however, I'm handicapped by being hidden away, with a millstone around my neck.'

'Your wife?' inquired Teddy, looking sharply at him.

'My wife! Why do you ask?' Rosmead exclaimed quickly, with affected indifference.

'Because — well, because you seem to regret your marriage, my dear old fellow, that's all,' his friend answered straightforwardly. 'Now, in the old days we never had any secrets, you and I; therefore there's no reason why we should have any now. Tell me plainly what troubles you.'

Rosmead hesitated. He had not come there to whine over his own personal troubles. He had never done so in Paris, and he had not intended to do so in London. But he could trust Teddy, for was he not his very best friend? had he not had hundreds of opportunities for testing the firmness of his friendship and loyalty, and never once had he found him wanting?

So again he cast himself into his chair, and related briefly how he had struggled and striven, how he had laboured

night and day in his desperate endeavour to gain a foothold in literature, and how all his efforts had been unavailing. He had merely been sowing the wind. Without hiding a single fact from the merry-eyed Irishman who sat before him, grave-faced in attentive attitude, he explained how he had first met Lena, and how, in order to save her from ruin, he had married her.

‘I did not love her,’ he cried emphatically. ‘I cannot — I shall never love her. Already she’s tired of me, tired of the life, which she declares is dull and joyless. She casts into my face all my failures, reproaching me for being such a fool as to try to win fame. For that I hate her — yet she is my wife, and, as such, it is my duty to do my best for her.’

Teddy sighed. He saw that his friend was terribly in earnest. It was this wife of his who was hampering him. He was certainly not the same happy, light-hearted Bertram that he had known in the dear old Quartier, but, grave-faced, heavy-eyed, and somewhat pale, he had now the countenance of a desperate man.

‘Your marriage seems, my dear old chap, to have been a mistake — a terrible mistake,’ he said decisively. ‘Anyone can see from what you say that she doesn’t love you. She merely married you out of caprice — merely in order to gain her own ends. At the moment when she accepted your offer she was in need of a protector, and has just used you as her tool. But why worry yourself over such a woman?’ he asked. ‘She has not your interests at heart as the wife of a professional man should have, and she’s utterly worthless.’

‘Do you think so?’ the unhappy journalist asked.

‘I know it,’ the artist assured him emphatically, qualifying his assertion next second by adding: ‘At least, what you’ve told me proves that she must be.’

‘Then what do you advise?’ the other asked, his eyes fixed upon the carpet.

‘The reply is obvious. If you allow her to constantly worry you, to upset your work by continually grumbling, then your chance of success will slip from you for ever. You’re not the first man by hundreds who’s been ruined by a vain, unsympathetic wife. You can never make a name while you have a woman of her character ever at your elbow.’

Rosmead pondered.

‘You suggest that I ought to leave her — eh?’ he asked at last.

O’Donovan raised his eyebrows with expressive gesture, and answered —

‘It’s the only course, if you really mean to get on. You are quite right in saying that you have a millstone around your neck. If you’re not careful, the dead weight will sink you. She can’t love you, or it would be impossible for her to act as she does — utterly impossible. Her freedom would no doubt please her, and you’d then be able to turn out better work, for your mind would be clear.’

‘But my conscience wouldn’t,’ answered Rosmead. ‘That means that I must abandon her. No,’ he added huskily, ‘I’ve made a fool of myself by marrying, but it shall never, never be flung into my face that I cast off my wife in order to gain my freedom and to achieve fame.’

‘Then you love her?’ the artist observed, with knit brows.

‘Love her!’ he echoed. ‘I hate and detest the sight of her.’

‘Then why not part?’

‘No, old chap, for two reasons that’s impossible,’ he replied. ‘First, my slender salary is insufficient to keep us both apart, and secondly I could never bring myself to cast

her off merely because she stands in the way of my personal advancement. She's my wife, and, as such, I must bear the burden.'

The artist looked full into his friend's face, sighed deeply, but no word escaped him. Of all his friends Bertram Rosmead, the man without talent and without money, had been the closest. He could not bear to see him crushed and disheartened in this manner.

'I'll tell you what I'll do,' he cried, suddenly jumping up, as a happy thought occurred to him. 'You must get on a better paper than that suburban sheet of yours, that's agreed. Now, Lady Elvaston is coming to give me another sitting to-morrow. I know her very well — dine there, and that sort of thing — so I'll ask her whether her husband couldn't put you on his staff.'

'On the *Evening Telegraph!*' cried Rosmead, joyously, his eyes bright with enthusiasm. 'Ah! if he only would. It's one of the oldest of the evening papers, and certainly holds highest rank. But I fear they take only the most experienced men.'

'Never admit ignorance of anything, my dear boy. I never do,' declared Teddy, airily, as was his wont. 'I'll have a talk with her to-morrow. We are very good friends, and we'll see if we can't work the oracle for you. Then some day when you write art criticisms, you may perhaps be able to give me a leg up — see? Hurrah for County Cork!'

And Rosmead joined in his friend's merry laughter, even though he had but little hope that such a course as was proposed would be of any avail.

His misgivings in that direction, however, had no foundation. True to his promise, the fashionable young painter put the matter before Lady Elvaston, who was well-known in London as an enthusiastic lion-hunter, with the result

that Bertram Rosmead, whose sole experience of the Press had been obtained upon that obscure, ill-printed little sheet, found himself one morning attached to the reporting staff of one of London's most respectable, most prominent, and most Conservative newspapers.

Unlike the local reporter, whose ambition it is to turn out as much 'copy' as possible, the reporter on a London daily strives to condense his information into the very smallest possible compass. The *Evening Telegraph* was not a large sheet, therefore the news had to be given in paragraphs, and so small was the amount of work done by the reporting staff, and so great was the grumbling among its members when any little extra duty had to be performed, that the sub-editors, of whom there were three, declared that their colleagues were 'paid to look miserable.'

Bertram Rosmead quickly discovered that, while his salary was doubled, his duties were mere child's play in comparison with those at Hounslow. He had taken a set of chambers in Dane's Inn, that chilling, dismal little paved court off the Strand, at the back of St. Clement's Danes church, a change which caused Lena the most profound satisfaction. The rooms, being situated at the back, were gloomy and prison-like, with ground-glass windows to hide the squalid outlook, and constituted as frowsy an abode as even the most dry-as-dust barrister could have wished for. It consisted solely of a small entrance-hall, a living-room, and one bedroom, and there being no room for a servant, Lena declared her intention to manage by herself rather than live in any part less central or further removed from that thoroughfare by her beloved, the Strand. Therefore they were compelled to cook, eat, and live in that one close back room, the faded carpet of which was worn into holes, with shabby, dirt-grimed furniture whence the stuffing escaped, the two book-cases at either end being filled with

musty leather-covered tomes of the law which had been fingered and pored over by generations of students who had previously tenanted the place.

Lena, of course, quickly made the dulness of her home an excuse for going out, a fact which her husband did not fail to notice. She was very often absent when he returned home — visiting her mother, or married sister, she said. And he believed her.

CHAPTER X

A WORLD OF 'TAPE' AND 'FLIMSY'

WORK on the *Evening Telegraph* did not at first admit of much time for literary pursuits. From the day on which he entered upon his duties he became much attached to the chief sub-editor, Mr. Fownes, a dark-bearded, easy-going, good-tempered man of about forty-five, who had himself gained his experience on the provincial press, and had, after twenty years of toil, gained that plum of journalism, the control of the news department of London's best evening paper. Upon Mr. Fownes rested the responsibility of everything. The editor was a mere figure-head, a man of very meagre literary attainment, who, however, bearing the hall-mark of Balliol, was accepted as a genius; while the leader-writers were so many pawns, who considered themselves too superior even to parley with the news department. Seated in his chair, with his two assistants on either side and his row of speaking tubes at his elbow, Mr. Fownes selected what news should appear in the paper, gave his orders to the various departments in something of the manner of the captain of a ship, for at a word from him the contents-bill changed as if by magic, or the ponderous, roaring machines below poured forth their tons of copies of the journal per hour, automatically gummed, folded, and counted into quires.

In that sub-editor's room there was eternal bustle and turmoil. Half-a-dozen telegraph instruments clicked on

monotonously night and day, Sundays and weekdays, registering on the 'tape' the news of the world; the private wire to the office in the City ticked out each hour, transmitting the latest from the Stock Exchange; hosts of men of all kinds, the hangers-on of journalism, entered every moment with some unimportant item of news which they dropped into a large basket; streams of telegraph messengers were constantly coming and going; men would open the door, shout some cabalistic word, and close it again without waiting for response; and reporters would enter, fling their single sheet of manuscript into the basket, curse the weather, and remark that it was time to return home. It was here where the real work of the paper was performed, in that dingy room, with its high-up windows, its paper-strewn floor, its panelled walls, wherein lurked many insects of a variety not unknown to the body of mankind, and where hung a coat so encrusted with dust that its original colour was indistinguishable. Has anyone ever seen a sub-editor's room without a frayed and dusty coat hanging upon a nail? Legend had it that this particular coat belonged to an assistant sub-editor who one day mysteriously disappeared, leaving no trace behind except the week's salary due to him and his office coat. He was believed to have been associated with the Nihilists, because he had on one occasion spent three days in St. Petersburg.

Throughout the day this sub-editorial trinity worked on, examining the reports as they came in, preparing some for the printers and rejecting others, eating their meals without moving from their chairs, and smoking briar-pipes until in the afternoon the air became so thick with smoke and the combined odours of the three meals that only those with strong stomachs could venture into the den. The chief sub-editor's chair was irreverently termed 'the perch' by all the staff, because he sat on a sort of raised dais, the

whim of some previous sub-editor, who had had it placed there because the machinery beneath should not jar him. The duties in that office had probably upset his nerves.

In all that busy hive of journalism however, the reporting department was the most interesting galaxy of talent. It was perhaps unique. The chief reporter, whose duty it was to lounge about in a tall hat during the morning and attend the House of Commons in the afternoon, was a thin, rather sallow-faced Scotchman, who would have 'taken a note' of the appearance of the Archangel as calmly as he sat in his box in the Gallery and scribbled his hieroglyphics at 'question-time.' He was a clever journalist, who had cultivated the art of being grimly sarcastic at the sub-editor's expense, whereupon the latter would, in revenge, cast his next contribution to the day's news into the huge waste-paper basket, or give it to the junior reporter to re-write 'without so much gas.'

The second reporter was a person of much distinction. He was an elegant young gentleman, of distinguished appearance and superior manners, whose chief labour seemed to consist in training his long, fair moustache, and who occasionally attended a meeting with the air of conferring a favour upon the sub-editors by doing so. He had earned the appellation of 'The Worm'—how no one knew; perhaps because he was once rebellious, and had 'turned.' Sometimes, in excess of zeal, he would write a 'bit of description' of some civic function, but this was generally noteworthy by reason of atrocious spelling, big words wrongly applied, and flowery aphorisms which the sub-editors promptly struck out, the long-suffering trinity being afterwards roundly abused for their well-meaning efforts to prevent the journal being held up to derision.

Next in rank was a tall, thin, fair-bearded young man, with hollow cheeks, who wore a rusty hat of the stove-pipe

shape, and an overcoat in the warmest weather. He went through the world with a wounded, grief-stricken expression, which seldom, if ever, relaxed. He had some secret sorrow, it was believed, and was never known to smile, unless it was on one celebrated occasion when the chief reporter, in leaving a meeting hurriedly in unwonted enthusiasm to 'catch an edition,' trod upon the new silk hat of the junior reporter. This glossy headgear was the first of its kind the youth had ever had, and he brought it back to the office under his arm.

It was a strangely-conducted organ, this — the gravest and greatest of London's evening journals. No one had ever been known to be discharged from its staff. The junior reporter already referred to, a youth who had served his apprenticeship to that profession, was an interesting specimen of its product, besides being a common object of the Strand. During his apprenticeship he had mainly distinguished himself by his sharp passages of arms with the head-printer, a very stout, grey-haired man, who had once been a sea-going skipper, whose motto was 'Time and this blanked Circular wait for no man,' and who sent the paper to press six times a day with the regularity of the synchronised clock over his head. This youth smoked cigarettes furiously, and, during the winter, used to be deputed by the reporting staff to stay in the office and keep up a good fire in their room. He was, in fact, stoker to the establishment. So enthusiastically eager had he been to learn his profession that, on the day he completed his six-years' term, the manager screwed up courage to tell him that he must consider his engagement at an end. Knowing, however, that such a course was entirely an innovation, this imperturbable youth still remained, and for the past three years had continued to draw his salary regularly, and even successfully demand an increase.

His opinion of the staff was amusing. He declared that they were 'a scratch lot,' and that between them they were not equal to the task of composing an advertisement of quack medicine. It was true that the training on the *Evening Telegraph* was decidedly unique. Taught to write almost next to nothing, the reporters, if the weather did not happen to be pleasant, quickly fell into the commendable habit of strolling along the Strand as far as Short's, or Romano's, spending half-an-hour there, and returning to the office, stating that the meeting they had attended was not worth reporting. On the other hand, had the last trump sounded, the industrious trio of sub-editors would have brought out an 'Extra Special,' containing 'Feeling in the City,' and calmly awaited the arrival of 'Latest Details' on one or other of the 'tapes.'

Among such surroundings Bertram Rosmead quickly became miserable. The whole reporting staff at once sneered at his inability to write shorthand swiftly, and poked fun at his reports when they appeared in the paper. The elegant young man with the moustache, who considered himself a critic of literature, music, the drama, and everything else beside, having once written an appreciative notice of some Christmas cards, was particularly sarcastic at Rosmead's expense, for it being whispered about the office that he wrote verse and fiction, he was at once dubbed 'our special novelist.' But this young fair-moustached critic was essentially a *fin-de-siècle* journalist, faultlessly dressed, who studied whole phrases from Ruskin and Carlyle, and slung them bodily into his conversation or his notices of the Lord Mayor's Show, the Dog Show at the Palace, the Military Tournament, or any of those other hardy annuals. In his own abilities he was perfectly confident. Whenever he worked, it was for the purpose of exhibiting his great talent and profound superior know-

ledge. And if the argus-eyed Fownes dared to alter a single word, this superior journalist would enter the room and roundly abuse him. Mr. Fownes, worthy man, had controlled the destinies of an influential paper when his youthful critic was sucking a coral consoler in his cradle, and usually treated such caustic remarks by walking from the room and having an interview with the foreman-printer.

So well regulated was that office that if a reporter interviewed anybody, or endeavoured to obtain an item of fresh news by unwonted enterprise, the others, consumed by jealousy, immediately howled him down. There were weeks when the rebellious reporting staff refused to speak with the sub-editors, or when the burly foreman-printer, after consigning the whole staff to asphyxiation by sulphur, worked on just as he liked, and sent the paper to press without any fresh news. Once when this occurred and he was remonstrated with, he gruffly replied —

‘What’s the good of giving the readers too much news? It spoils ’em for the future. If they can’t find sufficient in our sheet, let ’em spend an extra ha’penny and buy an *Echo*. They pay their money and take their choice. What more do they want?’

Before a fortnight had elapsed, Rosmead’s position had become almost untenable among all these conflicting interests and petty jealousies. From the junior reporter, who sat by a fire huge enough to roast a sheep, with his legs resting on a broken chair, pipe in mouth, and reading a stray volume of Dickens, to the thin-faced Scot, who took a morning snooze in the chair with one arm, the only easy one the reporters’ room possessed, they all conspired to bring himself and his work into derision. Alone among them all, the patient, clear-headed, keen-witted Fownes, who had read and admired his verses in the magazines, remained his friend.

Almost Rosmead's first engagement of importance was the investigation of a threatened serious strike of gas-workers out at Beckton, in the far east of London, a labour movement which would leave half the metropolis in darkness, and so well did he perform the task that his article was quoted by the *Times* and several other papers. For this he received commendation from Sir Charles Elvaston, a fact which at once aroused the bitterest hatred and jealousy of all his colleagues. Of such is the world of journalism. But treating their sneers and sarcasm with contempt, and gravely plodding on, content in the knowledge that his chief, Mr. Fownes, held him in respect, he continued to perform his duties. Many times portions of his reports or interviews had the distinction of being quoted by the morning papers, much, of course, to the chagrin of those interesting and talented gentlemen who were 'paid to look miserable.'

With his evenings free, Bertram continued his literary struggles at home. Before leaving Hounslow he had commenced a novel, a strange, weird story of man's betrayal and woman's love, which he had named 'Silent Fetters,' and some three months after joining the *Evening Telegraph*, there appeared a paragraph in the papers, saying that this novel was shortly to be issued by a publishing firm, one of the best-known in London. Even then Lena was not enthusiastic. She called him a fool for his pains, for sticking for ever at his desk, and laughed derisively at the sum he had received for the entire rights of the book. It was twenty pounds. She called it paltry, and was annoyed because it went to liquidate debts he had contracted at Hounslow. She wanted new dresses with it, but he was obdurate, and paid the bills.

The book duly appeared, a two-shilling novel of that class popular a few years ago as the 'yellow-back,' with a

striking picture cover, bearing his name in large red letters. With what pride he placed a copy before him and surveyed it; with what pride he saw it displayed on the bookstalls at Charing Cross and the other termini; with what pride he was importuned by the bookstall clerk at St. Pancras to buy his own book! The feeling of satisfaction at seeing one's first book on sale can only be fully appreciated by the man to whom it is the crowning result of years and years of toil and tribulation, of disappointment and despair.

But the *Athenæum* dismissed it in half-a-dozen lines of hostile criticism, and the reporters of the *Evening Telegraph* were jubilant. So carried away were they by enthusiastic satisfaction, that they cut out the notice and gummed it to the wall.

The crisis of their antagonism was, however, reached when, one day, on account of one of the sub-editors leaving to direct the news department of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Rosmead was appointed to his vacant chair. They then refused to allow their 'copy' to be cut about and improved upon by their late colleague, whom they declared was an arrant outsider, and very soon matters came to such a crisis, that Mr. Fownes was reluctantly compelled to take counsel with Sir Charles, with the result that the reporting staff received a snub which lingered long in the memory of its dissatisfied members.

During all this time, however, Rosmead continued to work at home, slaving ever beneath his lamp. His first book had been a qualified success. With the exception of the *Athenæum*, and perhaps one or two papers which review superficially and make it a rule to publish a smart and abusive paragraph at a new author's expense, the notices of the book had, on the whole, been appreciative. It was by no means a great work. The plot, they said, was good, but the story lacked characterisation, and its *dénouement* was

not sufficiently striking. A pirate publisher had reprinted it in America, and in several New York journals he found fairly good reviews of it.

At last he had become a novelist.

Twenty pounds for eight months' work is not a high rate of remuneration, and he plainly saw that, before he could become a professional author, he must earn considerably more than that. Therefore he set to work, disregarding Lena's incessant grumbling, and in his gloomy sitting-room wrote every night, and through the whole day on Sundays. He had commenced another book, in which he hoped to remedy the defects pointed out by the reviewers, a book which he intended should place him on a footing with popular writers, and towards that end he strove, buoyed by a new-born enthusiasm which his sulking, pouting wife did not share.

The 'Harbour Lights' had come to an end, and Bertram had caused her to relinquish her engagement. There was no real reason why she should be absent every evening, now that he was earning sufficient to keep them in the necessaries of life, therefore, much against her wish, he forced her to leave the Adelphi. No sooner had he done this than he regretted it.

'Now that you won't allow me to go on the stage any more,' she said one evening, 'you'll be able to take me sometimes to the music-halls. You know how fond I am of them. There's lots of tickets at your office — Mr. Fownes told me so.'

He hesitated. Evenings at music-halls, those insane entertainments which he so abominated, meant loss of valuable time, loss, perhaps, of his chance of making a name.

'But I can't work at my book and go out too,' he said.

'Oh! of course,' she cried, her eyes flashing with anger

‘You always place your writing before my enjoyment. You begrudge me any little pleasure, and would like to see me as staid as an old woman of fifty.’

‘No,’ he answered quietly, ‘I begrudge you nothing, Lena.’

‘But are you such an idiot as to suppose that I can stick for ever in these gloomy old chambers, and never go out? You’ve got your work — such as it is — to interest you. I’ve got nothing.’

‘You can surely read a little,’ he said, reflecting that for months he had never seen her with any book or newspaper in her hand, except the *Referee*.

‘Read be hanged,’ she answered petulantly. ‘I’m not a bookworm, and never shall be. You’ve chosen to make me give up the only bit of pleasure in life I had, therefore you must take me about of an evening.’

‘But can’t you see, dear, that my advancement is to your own interest?’ he pointed out. ‘Surely you would like to be able to have a nice house in the country and live happily?’

‘I’ve had enough of the country,’ she answered promptly. ‘You’ll never get me to live in it again. The Strand’s good enough for me.’

He sighed. She had not a grain of sympathy for him, even though she had seen him toiling night after night, seeking that will-o’-the-wisp, success. She had expressed no satisfaction when his first book had been published; she had never read it, and laughed when she confessed to her friends her utter ignorance of its contents. Selfish and narrow-minded, she had not profited by it, therefore it did not interest her in the least degree.

‘Surely a comfortable little house in the country, where we could live happily without my absence daily at the office, would be preferable to these two rooms,’ he said.

'I am only doing my best to get on, Lena, as every other man should do who has a wife.'

'And you earn twenty pounds after eight months' work,' she laughed contemptuously. 'My pay was small enough, but I earned more than that.'

The fact was, alas! too true. A supernumerary at a theatre was paid at a higher rate than fiction. How could he ever hope to make a living as a novelist?

'I am but beginning,' he observed, rather sadly, stifling the sigh which rose within him. 'Think of some men earning thousands a year at fiction.'

'You'll never be one of them,' she replied coldly, with a sneer. 'All of them have influential friends, and have greater talent than you have. What's the use of trying to accomplish things that are impossible.'

'Read the reviews of my book,' he answered, taking from his table a number of sheets of paper pinned together, whereon he had gummed the cuttings, and handing them to her.

'I don't want to bother my head over your wretched old reviews,' she cried, casting them from her. 'Such twaddle only makes you vain, and causes you to fancy you can write. But you'll never make a mark, for you ain't got it in you. If you had, your stories would hâve been taken long ago.'

'Your words are certainly extremely inspiring,' he observed, with some asperity.

'I only tell you the truth,' she answered. 'I'm your wife, and you ought to take my advice.'

'And give up all thought of writing fiction — eh? Relinquish all hope of being able to earn a living without daily toil at a newspaper office? Never!'

'No,' she cried fiercely. 'You care nothing for me — absolutely nothing. You sit here scribbling away night

after night, while I — I can mope or amuse myself as best I can. You've even taken my profession from me.'

'Profession!' he exclaimed, with a bitter smile. 'Is the mere walking on to a stage and striking an attitude to be elevated to a profession?'

'It's as honourable as yours,' she protested. 'If you had not taken me away from it, I should have had a speaking part in the new piece — I'm sure I should.'

'The theatre is no place for an honest, respectable wife,' he answered.

'Don't you think I can take care of myself?' she retorted. 'Trust me; I wasn't born yesterday.'

'I have always trusted you, Lena,' he replied calmly.

'Then why do you doubt me now?' she inquired, standing before him defiantly, with knit brows and a hardness about her mouth.

'I have expressed no doubt. You have left the theatre because I wished it — that's all.'

'And you'll take me to the music-hall of an evening because I wish it,' she said decisively. 'You've wasted time enough over your miserable scribbling.'

'If I spend my time at those inane variety entertainments, my chance will slip by,' he said. 'Cannot you remain in patience a little longer, until I have finished this book.'

'Another six months,' she observed, grumbling. 'No, I don't mean to bury myself, if you do; so that's straight.'

'It isn't necessary for you to bury yourself, as you choose to term it,' he responded. 'You go out in the daytime to see your friends, and I don't complain. I do not expect you to remain indoors alone always. I merely ask you to allow me to do my work at night.'

'I'm content enough to stay at home in the daytime, if

I go out of an evening,' she said. 'I must go out at night. I've always been used to it, and I mean to go.'

'Then you are determined to ruin all my prospects?'

'Prospects!' she echoed. 'Pretty prospects they are.'

He was silent. The prophetic words Teddy had uttered on that afternoon in his studio recurred to him. His friend had declared that this selfish, unsympathetic woman would ruin him, and it seemed as if his misgivings were likely to be fulfilled. He had manfully borne up against her ill-temper, her eternal grumbling, her bitter opposition to all his well-meaning projects, her discouraging apathy towards all his exertions, because he considered it dishonourable to leave her after having contracted marriage. He had borne his sorrows as only a calm, philosophical man can bear them; he had fought a valiant fight with his conscience, and still held mastery over himself.

Teddy O'Donovan was a frequent visitor at his chambers, but Lena hated him. On several occasions lately he had invited her husband to dine at the Saturday house-dinner at the Savage Club, but Lena had always shown such unwillingness to allow him any little recreation in which she herself could not participate, that he had been compelled to decline. Teddy pointed out that at the Savage were men who could be of use to him; but Lena cared nothing, absolutely nothing, for her husband's future so long as she had sufficient money for her cheap finery. In everything where Bertram was concerned his wife's inordinate selfishness asserted itself, until she lived for herself alone, caring for no one, heedless of all except her own pleasure and personal appearance, the latter consisting of powdering her face until the mixture of glycerine and chalk might almost have been scraped from her nose and cheeks.

Whenever Teddy visited at Danes' Inn he could not fail to recognise the dismal state of affairs, and often sighed

to witness how cruelly unsympathetic was Rosmead's wife. In the old days, his fellow-student had been a merry, rollicking fellow, with buoyant heart and laughing face. And now Bertram had become strangely silent, morose, and heavy-eyed. It was this ignorant, worthless, doll-faced 'walking lady' whom he had so foolishly made his wife, who was wrecking his future, sapping his life. Teddy hated and detested her.

Bertram looked up at her after a long silence.

'Well,' she asked. 'Aren't you going to take me out to-night?'

'No,' he answered, 'not to-night. To-morrow. I've got some verses to write to-night.'

'Oh, confound your wretched French poetry. Nobody reads it,' she said, with an angry sneer. 'Then I shall go out by myself.'

'Very well,' he answered. 'But you know it is against my wish that you should go out at night alone.'

'Well, if you won't come with me, I must go alone. I mean to go out at night and see a bit of life — and even you shan't stop me.'

Then, without another word, she went into the adjoining room, put on her things, and left without wishing him good-bye. When the door had banged, he sighed, passing his hand wearily across his darkened brow, then sank into the chair at his table, and, after much painful effort, wrote a short but beautiful poem, of which the following was the first verse: —

Rien n'est doux que l'amour, aucun bien n'est si cher ;
Près de lui le miel même à la bouche est amer.
Celle qui n'aime point Vénus sur toutes choses,
Elle ne connaît pas quelles fleurs sont les roses.

He sat writing until the clock of St. Clement Danes, having chimed 'Home, Sweet Home,' slowly and

solemnly struck the midnight hour. This aroused him. The roar of traffic in the Strand, the beating of London's heart, had died away. He flung down his pen in surprise that his wife had not returned. A thought occurred to him that she was probably waiting at her mother's for him to fetch her, so after a few minutes, he read through what he had written, blew out his lamp, and went out.

He rang the bell at the grimy old house in Gough Square, and after a long time the summons was answered by Mrs. Loder, aghast at seeing her son-in-law. Lena had not been there that evening, she said, and he turned heavily away, retracing his steps to his gloomy chambers. He inquired of the old commissionaire who acted as night-watchman, and was informed that she had not entered the Inn.

Then he climbed the dirty stairs to his rooms, and waited in sorrow and patience.

Soon after one o'clock he heard a latchkey thrust into the door, and his wife entered.

Her hat was slightly awry, her hair dishevelled, her face flushed, her veil torn. She stood for a few moments in the doorway of the dingy old room, looking at him, laughing stupidly, and swaying slightly.

Instantly the horrible truth dawned upon him, paralysing his senses. He stood in silence, regarding her with ineffable disgust. She was drunk.

From her glove there slipped a piece of green paper, which fluttered to the ground.

Her husband picked it up, and found it was the counterfoil of an admission ticket to that gilded and carpeted promenade of Aspasia, the grand circle at the Empire.

CHAPTER XI

‘TO LOVE AND TO CHERISH’

‘So you have returned?’ Rosmead exclaimed severely, regarding her with ineffable loathing. ‘You’ve been to the Empire alone, and come back to me in this disgraceful condition?’

‘What condition?’ she asked defiantly, advancing into the room with uneven steps, and sinking into a chair.

‘The condition you are now in — one of absolute intoxication,’ he retorted bitterly.

‘You — you say I’m drunk,’ his wife cried, her eyes aflame. ‘You’re a cruel beast! You take away all pleasure in life, and then abuse me. I’m not drunk. It’s a lie.’

He turned from her.

‘Faugh!’ he ejaculated. ‘Don’t seek to hide your vile, insufferable habits like that. I surely know when a person is drunk or not.’

‘I tell you I’m not drunk,’ she shouted, stamping her foot.

He shrugged his shoulders, nauseated, answering: ‘A man intoxicated is bad enough, but a drunken woman is the most wretched, debasing spectacle on God’s earth.’

‘I’m a debasing spectacle — am I?’ and she laughed stupidly.

‘I’m disgusted,’ he declared furiously. ‘For this there’s no extenuating circumstance. I told you I’d take you out to-morrow night; yet you put on your smart clothes,

and go alone to a place where even I myself wouldn't take you.'

'You're far too prudish,' she observed huskily. 'You're getting an old man before you're a young one.'

'Your action to-night,' he said, standing before her, 'shows me plainly that you have neither self-respect nor respect for me, your husband. Such a spectacle as you present is absolutely disgraceful. You have no soul above comic operas and music-halls.'

'Go on,' she said, laughing. 'I'm all attention. You don't care for entertainments yourself, and you're jealous that I should enjoy myself.'

'Enjoy yourself!' he echoed. 'Is going to a music-hall, mixing with a crowd of the fastest women in London, and getting intoxicated, your idea of enjoyment? If so, your tastes must be very debased ones.'

'My tastes are as cultivated as yours,' she protested, with faulty articulation, leaning back in the armchair and blinking at him. 'Because I happened to meet one of the girls at the theatre, and she stood me drink, you say I'm drunk. Why, you drink more in a day than I do in a month.'

This was a barefaced untruth, for he drank nothing beyond his glass of bitter at his meals. But when his wife was excited, all reason left her, and knowing this, he did not attempt to differ.

'I'm surprised, Lena,' he exclaimed — 'utterly disgusted at your conduct. Surely this is not the manner in which a respectable woman should conduct herself! I've done my best, and have tried to elevate you; but you seem only to sink lower and lower, until now you've lost every atom of self-respect.'

'Elevate me,' she cried. 'You! You're a pretty one to talk of elevating anybody, a stony-faced cur like you!'

‘You are complimentary, indeed,’ he observed, his face growing paler in anger.

‘And so are you, when you tell me I’m drunk.’

‘I wish to make no further comment upon that point to-night,’ he replied harshly. ‘I merely say that it is disrespectful towards me, your husband, to go drinking in low bars at midnight with this girl, whoever she is.’

‘Do you want me to go the whole evening without a drink when I’m thirsty, merely because you don’t like me to have one? You’ll want me to go to chapel next.’

‘A woman who had love or respect for her husband would neither act nor talk in this manner,’ he retorted bitterly, his grave, serious face darkening as he strode up and down the shabby room. ‘If your mother knew, she would sympathise with me.’

‘No,’ his wife sneered, ‘you’re gravely mistaken there. She regrets that I should have married such a miserable hound as you — a man who loves his books and his wretched scribbling better than his wife.’

She spoke the truth. Yes; he loved his work better than he loved her, because she had never shown the slightest interest in his projects, nor an atom of sympathy towards him. This discovery that she drank filled him with the most intense loathing. He hated all persons who had no control over themselves in the matter of drinking, and the publican was his pet abomination, whom he was never tired of denouncing. He was by no means narrow-minded, but in journalism he saw about him so many men and women ruined by drink, that spirituous liquors caused him loathing. In Paris his set drank heavily enough, but their thin red wine at four sous never intoxicated like the sulphurous, poisonous liquids which London publicans are allowed to sell under the names of whiskey, brandy, and gin. Half the whiskey sold in London public-houses is a spirit which

has a potency to send men and women temporarily insane. To its agency half the crimes of the metropolis are due, and to its agency more than half the poverty and wretchedness. In many a London bar a man or woman can get mad drunk for fourpence.

Even as Rosmead passed, he could smell the nauseating odour of his wife's breath.

'I loved you,' he burst forth bitterly, 'I loved you until, by your ill-temper, selfishness, and utter disregard for my welfare, you crushed every spark of affection or respect from my soul. And now you have taken to drink and music-halls.'

'It's entirely your fault,' she said, in a reproachful, languid voice, her eyes half closed. 'If you had stirred yourself about a bit and taken me out, I should never have wanted to have gone about by myself. I told you so long ago.'

'I have nothing of which to reproach myself,' he answered gravely. 'I have laboured in vain in my endeavours to make you view life in a proper manner, but you are daily sinking lower and lower, and would drag me down with you if you could. But understand me,' he cried, his eyes flashing as he stood before her. 'I hate and detest a woman who drinks, and if you continue, you'll no longer find a home with me.'

She looked at him unsteadily for a few seconds, her shifty eyes wide open in surprise. Then, with the same stupid, hideous grin of intoxication, she answered —

'Surely you don't think that such a threat troubles me in the slightest? I shall please myself whatever I do. You've married me, and you'll have to keep me. If I want a drink, I shan't ask you whether I may have it. It's your pals around you — that foppish idiot of an artist, O'Donovan, and the rest — who are trying to separate us. I know it. I'm not blind.'

‘No one is trying to separate us,’ he said sternly, his disgust inexpressible. ‘You are doing your best to create a breach between us, while I am slaving night and day in order to earn money to keep you in comfort and respectability. Surely O’Donovan is my friend. If it were not for him, I should still have been at Hounslow.’

‘Friend!’ she laughed, hiccoughing. ‘Your friends are my enemies. The mean skunk shall never enter this place again. If he does, then I go out. None of these men you call your friends are any good to you. They laugh at your futile literary attempts behind your back — and well they may.’

‘It may be left to my own judgment to choose my friends,’ he replied, annoyed. ‘It’s useless to argue with you further.’

‘Of course it is,’ she retorted. ‘Because you know that I speak the truth. A woman has always a keener instinct than a man.’

‘And if you used yours for my advancement, instead of my disgrace, it would be much more to your credit,’ he retorted. ‘A woman who once gives way to drink is damned for ever.’

‘So I’m damned,’ she laughed tantalisingly. ‘Abuse me a little more. It is so interesting — all this.’

‘To-night at the Empire there were several new turns, and the Press were invited. Many men who know you as my wife were there. What, I wonder, is their opinion of you rubbing shoulders with that crowd of wretched, painted women, drinking in their company, for aught I know.’

‘I saw one of your pals there — I forget his name. He talked to me for a long time,’ she said, speaking with difficulty, and repeating her words. ‘I told him that you preferred to stay at home, and he seemed amused.’

'Who was he?' Rosmead cried angrily. 'Describe him.'

'You're jealous — eh?' she exclaimed, smiling.

'No, not jealous,' he declared. 'I'm only grieved that you should thus so far forget yourself as to disgrace me in this manner. What will the men I know think when it is known that I allow you to go to a music-hall alone, Lena?' he added, in a hoarse voice, with a sorrowful note in it. 'You are driving me to desperation.'

'You've already driven me there,' she answered, with artificial gaiety. 'Well, I'm drunk — at least, you say I am — so I'll go to bed,' and she sighed.

'Not before you tell me with whom you've been to-night,' he cried, grasping her wrist. His face was blanched, his brows knit, his teeth set in firm determination. 'I'm not to be trifled with, and if you tell me a lie — by Heaven! I'll — I'll cast you out like a dog.'

'That's easier said than done,' she answered, setting her shoulders in an attitude of firm defiance. 'Remember, I'm your wife.'

'I wish I could regard you with respect as such,' he replied, with a touch of sorrow. 'But after to-night, after this disgraceful exhibition of your passion for low performances and drink, I can only look upon you and loathe you as an encumbrance. Tell me,' his grip, trembling with anger, tightening on her wrists. 'With whom did you go to the Empire to-night?'

'I decline to satisfy you,' she responded. 'I told you I should go, and I went. That's sufficient.'

'I demand to know who was with you,' he said, bending down closer to her, a fierce look in his angry eyes. The thought that she had thus disgraced him before his fellow journalists had made his blood rise within him. They would sneer at him as a fool for allowing her to go

there alone, exposed to the insults of that crowd of after-dinner loungers. To-morrow half Fleet Street would know about it, for in no circle does gossip travel more quickly than among pressmen.

‘I decline to tell you.’

‘You shall,’ he cried, with set teeth. ‘You hear me! You shall.’

‘I shan’t,’ and with a sudden twist of her hand, she wrenched herself free, and rose unsteadily to her feet.

Again he grasped her determinedly.

‘You hurt me,’ she gasped. ‘You’re a cowardly brute! I’ll tell everybody to-morrow how badly you treat me — see if I don’t,’ and she burst into drunken tears.

‘And to-morrow I’ll see your mother, and ask her to talk to you.’

‘You don’t think I care any more for my mother than for you — do you?’ she retorted. ‘Go to her, and see what sort of reception you’ll get.’

‘I shall go to her. She certainly will not encourage you in such disgraceful conduct.’

‘Oh, go to her, and be hanged,’ Lena answered, her face flushed, her eyebrows working convulsively, and her gaze unsteady. ‘I’m tired. I don’t care about being up all night, if you do.’

‘Who was with you at the Empire?’

‘Nobody you know. A girl at the theatre.’

‘That’s a lie,’ he cried, looking straight into her eyes. ‘If she was one of your theatre friends, she would be at work all the evening.’

‘She’s left the theatre,’ Lena answered briefly, in a voice which plainly betrayed her hopeless state of intoxication.

‘And you met her at the Empire?’

‘Of course I did.’

A paroxysm of anger seized him, as the truth crossed his mind.

'Then you are so debased that you actually cannot recognise the disgrace of being seen in company of such a woman. No respectable woman would go there alone. Every admission you make adds to my disgust. You've been drinking in company of such a low woman as that!' He released her hand, and flung it from him, saying — 'Go to bed. A woman who has lost her self-respect so entirely as you have is no longer worthy the position, or even name, of wife.'

'Your abuse don't hurt me. I abominate and detest your mean, miserable ways, and your ugly face, always as grave as a monk's. You don't know how to treat a woman as a gentleman should. You think yourself a gentleman, but you're an egotistical cad. I hate you!' she screamed in her drunken passion — 'I hate you!'

'Go to bed,' he said firmly, pointing to the door. 'Sleep off your beastly drunkenness, and then, when you are sober, we'll resume this discussion.'

'You can't answer. You know what I say is the truth, miserable, melancholy hound that you are.'

'Go. Do you hear me?' he shouted, springing towards her, his hands clenched.

She saw how desperate he was, and in that moment fear of him seized her. Next instant, however, she gave vent to a hollow laugh, meant to be derisive, but hideous in its artificiality, took her cape from the chair, and tossing her head with an expression of utter contempt, staggered from the room.

CHAPTER XII

THE BOOM

SUB-EDITORIAL duties on the *Evening Telegraph* were distracting, but the hours were short. Rosmead commenced work at half-past seven in the morning, and left at two, the bulk of the day's work being over by that hour. It must not be supposed, however, that the office was a sinecure, for the piles of telegrams and 'flimsy' which he waded through with a keen eye for errors in grammar, exaggerations of the truth, or uninteresting 'padding' were such as would astonish anyone save the sub-editor, whose mind in that direction has been reduced to something of a machine. But Rosmead's work terminating early, he had the afternoon and evening in which to continue his literary work.

The discovery of his wife's fondness for drink had increased his anxiety tenfold, but, with his generous nature, he had forgiven her, on condition that such an event should not again occur. A few weeks later he received his first commission in fiction. The editor of *Clippings*, a popular weekly paper, having read his novel, wrote, asking him to call. He did so, and when he left, he carried in his pocket an agreement whereby he was to write a sensational serial story of sixty thousand words, and for it receive the sum of thirty pounds, to be paid in weekly instalments as the story appeared.

In the seventh heaven of delight, he returned to Danes' Inn, climbing the stairs two steps at a time, and bursting

into the room, waved the paper above his head joyfully, crying —

‘At last! Lena. They are beginning to see that I can write. Look at this!’

She took the agreement from his hand, and read it unmoved.

‘Only thirty pounds!’ she observed, with a sneer. ‘It’s paltry enough. Why, other men would get three hundred for a long story like that.’

‘I am but a beginner, and at present have to be content with what is offered me,’ he answered. ‘I’m not sufficiently known to employ an agent to conduct my affairs and bargain for me.’

‘So you’re going to slave for three months or so for thirty pounds?’ she cried petulantly.

‘Yes,’ he answered, in a calm voice. ‘I have begun low down, and am content to climb slowly.’

That night he commenced his story, a curious mystery of London life, with a strong love interest. It opened with a tragedy, abounded in dramatic scenes, and into it he put his very heart and soul. Constant practice had taught him some *technique*, and now he found himself unconsciously balancing the grave with the gay, and working slowly towards his climax.

One morning he awoke to find himself being ‘boomed.’ On his way along the Strand to his office, he chanced to glance up at a hoarding, and what he saw caused him to stand amazed. Upon an enormous picture-poster, representing a beautiful girl standing behind a half-open door with a revolver in her hand, was the title of his story, and below ‘By Bertram Rosmead,’ in letters two feet long. He continued along the Strand to investigate other hoardings. Yes, upon every one was this same striking poster, with his own name looking so strangely grotesque, glaring

in his eyes. Not only in London was this advertisement posted, but in all the great provincial towns; therefore, within a week or two, a very large section of the public, especially readers of *Clippings*, which boasted a circulation of nearly a million copies weekly, knew the name of London's newest author.

The first instalment so pleased the enterprising editor that he wrote him a polite letter of thanks, and as soon as the first chapters appeared, the circulation of the paper went up by leaps and bounds, attributable, of course, to the publication of the highly-interesting serial.

To him this was gratifying; but progress in fiction meant increased jealousy on the part of the staff of the *Evening Telegraph*. They endeavoured to deride his plot, to poke fun at the poster, as though he had designed it, and to cast slurs upon *Clippings*, as a paper circulating mainly among errand-boys. Mr. Fownes was still confident in his assistant's ability; but his other colleague of the trinity, a stout man of quick temper, who had endeavoured to enter literary life and failed, became, for some unaccountable reason, Rosmead's bitterest enemy. Jealousy of his success was, of course, at the root of it; but he rather enjoyed his colleague's sneers than otherwise. In no profession, not even in the drama, are jealousies so fierce as in literature. The mere journalist is, in most cases, fiercely antagonistic towards his literary brother, because the latter is his own master, and can work where and when he chooses. To the pressman, as to many others, the life of the writer of fiction is believed to be an ideal existence. In a few cases, perhaps it is, but in the majority, even the popular novelist, whose name is on everyone's lips, and whose doings and sayings are chronicled in every newspaper up and down the kingdom, has his skeleton in his cupboard.

Of the staff, the reporters were, of course, the most sarcastic ; but the fever-heat of their jealousy was reached when, a few months later, the object of their sarcasm was chosen to go abroad as special correspondent to witness the unveiling of the Holy Coat at Treves, in Germany, a ceremonial performed once every fifty years. The sacred relic is kept walled up in the church, and only exposed for adoration during five days twice every century. For months the coming event had been commented upon by the Continental Press, great pilgrimages had been arranged, and many of the most distinguished dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church had promised to attend.

It was, therefore, decided that the *Evening Telegraph* should have a special account, and Rosmead, by reason of his able descriptive powers, was commissioned to proceed there, an honour which only the working journalist can appreciate. The expenses allowed on the *Evening Telegraph* were always liberal, and never questioned. Indeed, on one occasion a reporter bet one of his colleagues a new hat that, in his weekly account of expenses, he would put down the item, 'Cab up office-stairs, one shilling,' and get it. He did so, and it was actually paid without question. Reporters on the *Evening Telegraph*, presumed to be superior persons, were not expected to walk anywhere ; therefore if they only strolled as far as Trafalgar Square, they charged 'bus fare there and back, while cabs to and fro between the office and the House of Commons were so numerous that the office-boy had been known on several occasions to take a hansom and drive around Hyde Park for an airing — at the expense of the journal. Truly it was a remarkable journal, this steady-going, lethargic, and highly-respectable evening paper.

The allowance being so liberal, Rosmead decided to take Lena, and one night they left Liverpool Street, travelling

viâ Harwich and Antwerp to Brussels, arriving there next morning. Lena was, of course, delighted. It was the first time she had been on the Continent, and all was novel to her. As they were changing to the Bâle express at Brussels they were startled to hear a shout behind them, and a voice crying —

‘What, ho, Bertram! Where are you off to in such a deuce of a hurry?’

Both turned instantly, and were confronted by Teddy O’Donovan, struggling beneath the weight of his heavy kit-bag.

‘You!’ his friend cried. ‘I’m off to Treves to see this Holy Coat there’s been such a talk about.’

‘And I, too, old chap,’ cried Teddy, gleefully. ‘I’m going for the *Graphic*.’

Lena glanced at the artist with a shadow of annoyance on her face, and greeted him very coldly.

The train, with its restaurant car, was ready to start, so they scrambled up into an empty compartment, and a few moments later were on their way to the German frontier by way of Namur.

Teddy explained that he had been in Brussels a week, visiting an artist whom he had met in Florence, and while Rosmead related to him the plot and development of another new serial for *Clippings*, Lena, whose antipathy towards O’Donovan amounted almost to a mania, ensconced herself in a corner, and tried to read some of the English papers she had bought before leaving London.

This unexpected meeting gave the utmost satisfaction to both men, but when in the evening they alighted at Treves, they found themselves in a dilemma. Every bed in the town had been taken weeks before, and even long sheds had been erected at the roadside for the accommodation of the thousands of pilgrims who had flocked there from all

parts of France and Germany. For a couple of hours they drove from hotel to hotel, endeavouring to find a resting-place, but without success, and at length, about nine o'clock, were compelled to leave by train and stay the night in that curious, old-world town, Luxemburg.

Early next morning they again took train to Treves, and found the town crowded to excess with the unwashed, the halt, and the maimed, all of whom believed that sight of the sacred relic would heal them. So great, indeed, was the multitude around the cathedral that they were unable to approach anywhere near to the entrance, and as the bishop had issued an order that no tourist or sightseer was to enter the cathedral while the holy garment was on show, the two correspondents found themselves severely handicapped. Through the whole morning, in the broiling sun, they struggled and fought with the crowd to advance towards the entrance, but without avail. So great was the press that Lena declared that she would faint, and at length, tired and exhausted, they were compelled to relinquish their efforts and obtain lunch. This they took in a little restaurant in the Grande Place, a few doors from that old fifteenth-century hotel known as the 'Rathshaus,' and it was while they were eating their meal, and Rosmead was cursing their ill-luck, that the suave proprietor, a portly, good-humoured German, over-hearing, advanced and began to chat with them.

To him they related their woes, when, laughing at them heartily, he said: — 'As it happens, I'm one of the honorary guardians of the Coat. The guardianship descends from father to son, and has been in my family for nearly three hundred years.'

'Then you might get us a private view of it after the closing of the public exhibition,' Rosmead suggested, with journalist instinct.

‘I only want a single glance at it,’ added the irresponsible Teddy, smiling. ‘If not, then I’m afraid I shall have to make some fancy sketches.’

‘What! publish views of it from imagination?’ Lena asked in surprise.

‘Why not? I’ve come out here to sketch, and I’m going to sketch something or other, if it’s only an empty barn.’

Meanwhile the genial, fair-haired restaurant-keeper was hesitating. The easy-going manner of these two Bohemians had commended itself to him, and a few minutes later he explained that at four the cathedral closed for the day. If they would meet him half-an-hour later at a side-door which he indicated, the cathedral being in sight from where they were sitting, he would take them in just for an instant’s peep at it.

‘It’s against the bishop’s orders, you know,’ he added; ‘but I’ll see what I can do.’

Both men thanked him heartily, and the two spent the afternoon inspecting the Roman remains, the great, gloomy old Porta Nigra and other lions of the place, until half-past four, when they kept the appointment. Unfortunately, however, almost at the same instant that the good-hearted restaurant-keeper arrived with his key, the bishop himself emerged from that very door. The great man, seeing the honorary guardian in company with strangers in tweed suits, regarded him with suspicion, and on account of that their friend dared not allow them to enter. So again they were thwarted and disappointed; again they went back to Luxemburg to sleep, wearied, after a long and futile day.

The life of the special correspondent is fraught with many adventures, and though frequently enjoyable, the difficulties which beset his path are often almost insurmountable. Travelling and sight-seeing are not his only

duties. He has always to bear in mind that the news agencies are everywhere at work and may forestall him, supplying his paper with a longer and better account of the event than he himself is able to obtain, and that, in such case, his journal has expended a good round sum in expenses and telegraphy for absolutely nothing, his 'copy' on arrival being pitched into the waste-paper basket as 'old stuff,' which Reuter's have already done better. Again, as Reuter's correspondent is generally a well-known inhabitant of the town, he always secures priority at the telegraph office, which, to the special correspondent, is a matter of the very highest importance. It is, indeed, on record that the correspondent of a well-known morning paper, in order to secure the monopoly of a wire to London, gave the telegraphist a copy of the Bible, and told him to telegraph it. This was done, and when the operator had got to the fourth chapter of Genesis, the enterprising correspondent handed in his telegram, afterwards causing two more chapters to be telegraphed, so as to close the wire for a time against any other message to London. Dodges such as these are in the everyday life of the successful correspondent, the man who travels from one end of the world to the other as diligent servant of the British public.

In this case it looked very much as if the correspondents of the *Evening Telegraph* and the *Graphic* would have to depart empty away. That night, however, they held solemn counsel, and next day, returning to the pilgrimage-town, they purchased blue linen blouses of that form so popular in Belgium and Luxemburg, and buying straw hats, copies of the canticles, a rosary each, and a cross of red and blue silk, which they pinned to their breasts, lounged about the Place before the cathedral, watching their opportunity.

At last it came. A great pilgrimage from Metz arrived

in procession, headed by priests, banners, censers, and other accessories, and slowly entered the ancient pile. Unobserved in the crush, the pair joined it, while Lena went across to a café to await them, and chanting the canticles vociferously, artist and journalist wended their way through the zealously-guarded portals into the great, dimly-lit cathedral, where upon the high altar, surrounded by a thousand candles, the sacred and much revered relic was exposed to view. On either side stood two priests in gorgeous vestments, and as the pilgrims passed in single file before it, they handed up their rosaries, rings, or handkerchiefs to be placed for an instant in contact with the piece of brown stuff, which looked something like sack-cloth, departing in belief that the articles possessed a supernatural power to heal all diseases.

The sight was a strangely impressive one, a marvellous illustration of the peasant's firm belief in the teaching of the priests. The hundreds of thousands of pilgrims swarming in that town, eating up every particle of food like locusts, sleeping by the wayside, and travelling to and fro in railway cattle-trucks, were fully confident that this was the veritable coat which our Lord wore at His crucifixion, even though microscopical analysis had long ago proved that the material from which it was originally woven was unknown until four centuries later. The French, German, or Italian peasant will believe anything which the priest tells him, and even here, in Treves, the restaurant-keeper, who was one of the guardians of the revered tunic, had remarked to Rosmead :

‘ Ah ! all this is a fine harvest for the priests.’

Such being the case, was it any wonder that the Paris *Figaro* should one day have treated its readers to a learned and diverting discourse upon the discovery in Austria of a holy pair of trousers ? Was it any wonder, either, that

this pair of irresponsible merry-makers should have treated the exhibition as a huge joke, and poked fun at it? By three o'clock they had escaped from the crowd and rejoined Lena, then, having held consultation, decided to leave Treves at once and spend a day or so in one of the quiet villages on the Moselle, where they might finish their work without interruption. Rosmead looked at his map, and found a village in which he had spent a few days when on tramp after leaving Paris. It was Alf, a sleepy little place, situated at the bend of the river amid most picturesque surroundings, a spot unknown to the tourist, quaint, lethargic, and world-forgotten.

So that night they found themselves at the old inn, the only one Alf possesses, famous for its trout, its Brauneberger, and its Berncastel 'Doctor,' a low-built, old-fashioned hostelry, which only awakens from its slumbers thrice daily, when the dusty old post-diligence on its way from Treves to Coblenz, or the one from Cochem, away over the Eifel, arrives and changes horses. The approach of the lumbering old vehicle is heralded by the winding of a horn, which echoes for miles along the valley, warning the post-master to have his bag in readiness and the ostler to harness the horses. The charm of the old place had lingered in Rosmead's memory. He well remembered how he had worked for a day or two gathering grapes on that hill-side, and had slept in a dry outhouse not far from the inn. Indeed, from the window of his room next morning he saw the shed which had given him shelter, and sighed when the bitter truth occurred to him that he was even happier in those wild, free days than now.

The August day was bright and warm, and while Lena amused herself in the garden beside the river among the bowers of Maréchal Niel roses, her husband sat near her in the open air, writing a description of the Holy Coat of

Treves, and Teddy, having found an easy wicker chair in the inn, brought it out, stuck his legs on another, and proceeded to finish the rough sketches he had made. Rosmead had received instructions to treat the subject just as he found it. He had found it ridiculous, therefore he wrote the most amusing yet the most bitter criticism of any that had appeared in the Press. He headed his article 'The Holy Coat of Treves: By an Amateur Pilgrim,' described his efforts to view the 'sacred' relic, and how subsequently he went in decked out in his double cross of red and blue, a pious expression on his face, and a rosary in his hand. From time to time as he wrote he smiled, and then, in reply to Teddy's demands, read aloud the most amusing extracts, causing roars of laughter. This article, which he transmitted to London later in the day, was without doubt an exceedingly clever piece of work, and justly won for him a reputation as correspondent. It was strikingly brilliant. Unlike the production of the majority of correspondents, who, in their painful endeavours to be funny, project a few wisps of wit into their wilderness of words, it was genuinely and excruciatingly humorous. Indeed, such was its biting sarcasm and caustic criticism, that within a week of its appearance in the *Evening Telegraph* it received the distinction of being translated into German, and appearing, with illustrations, in the best-known of the comic journals in Berlin, the result being that the editor of that paper was afterwards prosecuted for ridiculing a holy relic, and sentenced to enforced retirement for six months!

That night, when Rosmead had dispatched his article, they dined out in the garden beneath the trailing roses, and afterwards, when it grew dark and the dew fell, smoked in the long old dining-room, with its antique carved oak and its row of old drinking-mugs upon the buffet. They were the only visitors at the inn, the only strangers in Alf; for

as yet the Moselle is unknown to the tourist, although the day is not far distant when the Rhine-weary holiday-maker will turn his step towards the Eifel and the Moselle, and 'grand' hotels and *pensions* will raise their hideous white façades upon the vine-covered, ruin-crested slopes between the Marienberg and the Schloss Eltz, that structure so bewildering that one wonders how it could have been built by human hands.

Lena retired to bed early, with an excuse that she was tired, and the two men sat for an hour or so, smoking, and sipping a bottle of Brauneberger of that delicious bouquet which one can obtain only in the country where it is made. They were alone in the great, half-lighted old room. The window was still open, and beyond glistened the river rippling in the light of the full moon. The post-diligence, with its jingling bells, had arrived, changed its horses, and departed on its long night journey to Coblenz, just as it had done any time during the past century or so, and all was still and peaceful in the little old-world village. Within sight of the window, in the full moonlight, stood the plain stone cross with a list of names inscribed thereon, the names of those gallant sons of Alf who fell at Sedan in the war with the French in '70.

'Then we return to-morrow,' the artist was saying. 'Can't you stay another couple of days? It's pleasant enough here. You want a change, old chap. It will do you good.'

'Yes,' his friend said. 'I feel as if a month's rest would set me up; but it is impossible. We are short-handed at the office, and a fortnight's holiday a year is all anybody at our place is entitled to.'

'I should try and spin out a few more days, if I were you,' he said persuasively.

'No,' he answered. 'Impossible. I've got other work

on hand that I must do. An artist, like yourself, is his own master; but a journalist is always at the beck and call of the journal which employs him. I only wish it were possible to spend a week or two here. I know the country. It's the most peaceful and most beautiful in all Germany, the ideal holiday resort for an over-worked man.'

'Then you absolutely must go to-morrow?'

'Yes,' he answered. 'My story in *Clippings* is not finished, and as it's being published week by week, I can't be behind with it. Besides, I've two fresh commissions which will keep me busy for the next month or so.'

'Soon you'll be able to dispense with newspaper work, my dear fellow. You've certainly made a hit in *Clippings*. They've boomed you magnificently.'

'Yes,' Rosmead answered. 'Nowadays everything is boom. Without advertisement, even Scott or Dickens wouldn't stand a chance to-day. This is proved by the splendid books by cultured writers which are dead failures because they are not sufficiently advertised. Publishers are fond of saying that advertisement will never make a bad book go. But look at any library list, and you'll find that the best advertised book is the book in the greatest demand.'

'I don't read novels very much,' Teddy observed, smiling, 'but when I do, I somehow manage to get hold of a choice sample of rubbish. My luck, I suppose. When people — women who sit to me, for example — rave about a book, I read it, but it generally turns out to be some insane rot — sex problem, the emancipation of women, or such like theme, which is discussed in smart society, and thereby obtains a dinner-table notoriety.'

'That's just what makes a book go,' his friend said, 'dinner-table chatter. I maintain that anything, be it a

quack medicine, somebody's soap, or a new novel, providing it is judiciously advertised, will sell like hot cakes.'

'The boom is of the man nowadays, not his works. Look at some men in the Savage, for example.'

'Of course,' the journalist answered. 'I know one man in your club whose sole claim to distinction is that he once wrote a blood-curdler in the *Boy's Own Terrifier*. He has the audacity to invite serious editors to lunch, holds forth on the higher criticism, and having gone through the paragraph boom, is now accepted as a genius. He means to write a book some day.'

'Ah! I know that man,' Teddy said, laughing. 'There's lots of his sort about. Nowadays men get boomed before they've done anything. It's puff first and work after with you literary men. With us, we have to make a bit of a show in the Academy before anybody will believe in us.'

'Yes, every paper has its literary column, and will publish paragraphs about the doings of the most unknown tyro in fiction, because they're only too glad to get hold of stuff to fill it up. Hence the twaddle you read about novelists. A man's true worth is never known by the public, because the greater art a novelist displays in booming himself, the greater is the public's appreciation. Why, there's one man actually known in literary circles as "The Boomster," because he has elevated the art of self-advertisement to a science.'

'You'll never do that, old chap,' Teddy said. 'You're too much of a Bohemian ever to become a literary bounder.'

'I hope I never shall,' Rosmead answered. 'They say success spoils a man. It might spoil me.'

'No, never,' his friend answered. Then, lowering his voice, he added, 'The only thing that I fear may spoil you,

may even ruin you, Bertram, is your domestic infelicity. Lena seems more petulant, more nervous, more hysterical than ever.'

The journalist sighed.

'Yes,' he replied. 'You know my difficulties, old chap. I've confided in no one but yourself. My life is absolutely colourless and blank. I work on, it's true. I'm gradually beginning to reap the benefit of my years of hard struggle, but I fear it's all in vain — it all leads to nothing.'

'Yours is hard luck — devilish hard luck,' observed Teddy, sighing. 'I only wish I could help you, but while you are still with her you are hopeless. I don't say that to disparage her, but merely because I'm your friend, you understand.'

'You told me so long ago,' Rosmead observed mechanically. 'I'm seriously hampered by her.'

'Not only hampered,' Teddy said seriously, his eyes fixed upon the friend of his student days. 'Not only hampered, but disgraced.'

'Disgraced?' cried the journalist, starting forward, for he had told not a soul of Lena's penchant for drink. 'Disgraced? What do you mean?'

CHAPTER XIII

BOHEMIA AND BELGRAVIA

IN an instant Teddy O'Donovan saw that his anxiety for his old friend's welfare had once more nearly led him to betray himself. With consummate tact, however, he laughed at his friend's eager inquiry, and turned the conversation into a different channel.

For an hour they continued to chat, then parted for the night.

When Rosmead entered his bedroom, however, he found his wife seated in an easy-chair in a state of semi-intoxication. Before leaving London he had placed a bottle of brandy in his bag, in case of emergencies, and the remains of this she had emptied.

'You've been a long time,' she said huskily, inert and helpless. 'I thought you'd never leave your pal. Was his conversation so very interesting?'

He glanced at the empty bottle standing upon the dressing-table, and took in the situation at a glance.

'You had better go to bed,' he said calmly. 'It's late, and you are tired — very tired.'

'Yes,' she said, 'I'm very tired,' and she sighed wearily, and began to prepare herself for bed. He knew it was useless to talk to her in that condition, therefore did not attempt it. She had promised him on the night she had gone to the Empire that she would not drink again, but she had broken her promise, and was now stupidly drunk. True it

was, as Teddy had long ago predicted, this woman, with her powdered doll's face and coquettish manner, would ruin him. Slowly, but surely, he was achieving fame, yet the fruit of all his labour was thrown to the winds. Now that this terrible truth was forced upon him, he found himself becoming more and more callous, more heedless of reputation and of fame. Hundreds of times he had heard it said that in woman drunkenness was a vice which could never be eradicated. This penchant for drink created a breach between Lena and himself which widened daily — which some day must put them asunder.

Yet, when he reflected, he remembered that each man and woman had some besetting sin, and he debated within himself whether, after all, it was fair to abandon her on account of a failing over which she had no control. She was a woman, he remembered, and a woman had not the strength of will which a man possessed. On the other hand, he sighed when he remembered how for months she had sought to deride his work and to heap ridicule upon it, in order that, instead of striving to gain a livelihood by fiction, he might take her to those lower music-halls in the direction of which her vulgar tastes always led her. She hated theatres, but loved variety entertainments and ballets. It was not for the art displayed there, for she had not the slightest artistic instinct either in her dress, in her home, or in her amusements, but merely because the songs had a *double entendre*, and the dances were a trifle risky. Things are said, and suggestions are made, on the stage of the modern music-hall which would not have been tolerated in public even in those degenerate days when the 'Hole in the Wall' still existed. Girls in their teens are now taken by their elders to witness performances which are fraught with thinly-disguised indecencies, and learn to laugh at them without a blush. Even with such useless officials as County Coun-

cil inspectors and the mock supervision of Bumbledom, the state of the modern music-hall has never been so bad as it is at present, for in no capital in Europe is prostitution so openly tolerated and encouraged as it is by the management of the West-end 'hall.' Even the state of the Moulin Rouge, that pasteboard and gilt hall of Terpsichore which Paris supports for the delectation of the foreigner, is less pernicious than the gilt and plush 'lounge' of the first-class London music-hall.

The recent puritanical movement which aimed at sweeping clean our music-halls may have been ill-timed, but its object was commendable, for while the County Council investigate very closely the application of an East-end public-house for a dancing licence, they license the West-end halls for vice with scarcely an inquiry. Possibly many of those estimable seekers after notoriety who are so fond of writing 'C.C.' after their names hold shares in the various halls, and are well aware that such investments are extremely profitable. It would be interesting to know how many members of the London County Council hold shares in London music-halls. Sad as it is, it is, nevertheless, a fact that vice pays always.

Rosmead said nothing to his wife next morning. He merely placed the empty bottle aside when packing, deeming it best to treat the matter with indifference, and two days later they were back again in their gloomy chambers in that dreariest and dingiest of London Inns.

Marcus Aurelius has left directions by means of which every worry-line may be removed from the hand, and every anxious wrinkle from the face. If that tranquil philosopher, skilled in the science of the imperturbables, could visit the interior of a London newspaper office, he would be shocked at the unnatural disfigurements of those who scribble for their daily bread. As the journalist's worries increase, the

hairs decrease, until the bald truth shines out unmistakably. Such being the case, it is the first duty of the sub-editor to school himself not to worry. The secret, of course, lies in the concentration of the forces upon the thing in hand without suspense as to the issue. He may, of course, have the issue of the paper at heart. That is his duty. Only the act of God, the Queen's enemies, and other modes of the inevitable, release him from responsibility, and therefore he sits in his chair, calm and unmoved by any of those extraordinary events which hourly flow before his notice. Every moment, indeed, demonstrates the incongruity of a world where a man may fall fifty feet over a precipice without hurting himself to-day, and to-morrow die of eating a faded oyster. But he is a pressman, without conscience and without nerves, and the stranger the story, the more interesting it will be to his readers.

On Bertram resuming his chair, he found that his article on the Holy Coat, while giving the most complete satisfaction to Sir Charles and to the Oxford young gentleman whose lack of journalistic knowledge fitted him for the post of editor, had aroused the bitterest indignation of 'The Worm' and his colleagues. The young gentleman with the fair moustache, the height of whose attainment had been the writing of a description of the Lord Mayor's Show — mainly from the dusty files of the past — had believed himself qualified for the office of special correspondent, and his criticism of Rosmead's article was extremely amusing by reason of its painful hostility and its Carlylean flow of big words. This talented young gentleman that very day wrote two reports, one in which he referred to an assemblage of local 'magnets,' and in the other, reporting a speech regarding affairs in Matabeleland, he wrote that the natives were returning to their 'crawls.'

The life of a sub-editor on a daily paper, though one

of terrible monotony, is fraught with some diversions, and that of Bertram Rosmead was no exception. His home life was wretched enough, and his harassing work sufficient to turn his hair grey before its time. Indeed, since he had occupied his chair in that office, he felt himself prematurely ageing, and had dropped into a groove, working mechanically, half inclined to abandon all hope of becoming a successful novelist.

One day, when one of the trinity was away suffering from a bilious attack — a frequently-recurring malady in the office of the *Evening Telegraph* — and Mr. Fownes had gone out after his lunch to obtain ten minutes of fresh air on Waterloo Bridge, Rosmead chanced to be called out of his room to consult the head-printer. When he returned, a few minutes later, all the tapes were still working away industriously, with that dull, metallic, monotonous click, the long strips of white and green paper twisting like snakes into the baskets below.

Before re-seating himself he glanced along at them to discover what was the latest news, when his eyes caught the following startling words: 'Her Majesty died at Windsor at a few minutes past noon to-day.'

He stood dumbfounded. In every newspaper office throughout the kingdom the death of the Queen is an event spoken of with bated breath. Indeed, in every office of a daily journal there are a special set of emergency arrangements to be put in force in case of such national bereavement.

Rosmead glanced at the tape, and saw it was the one supplied by the Exchange Telegraph Company. Rushing across to one of the speaking-tubes, he shouted down to the machine-room, 'Stand by there! Queen's dead!'

In an instant the appalling news spread through every department of the great establishment, and news-runners, those

sturdy itinerant, strident-voiced fellows who dash along with bundles of paper beneath their arms, hearing it, ran out into the Strand, proclaiming the terrible intelligence to passers-by. Within a few minutes a crowd of clerks, printers, reporters, and others assembled in the sub-editor's room to view the telegram, and Rosmead was in the meantime at the telephone asking the head office of the Exchange Company, in the Haymarket, whether they had any confirmation of the startling report.

‘It don't want any confirmation. We're not in the habit of sending out fictitious news,’ answered a deep, sepulchral voice.

‘But it is not confirmed by any other agency,’ Rosmead observed.

‘They'll get it later on,’ said the voice. ‘Our rivals are always a day behind the fair.’

‘But where did you get the report from?’ inquired the sub-editor.

‘Our correspondent at Windsor. He's reliable — very reliable.’

Mr. Fownes had just entered, hot and breathless. He had overheard the report in the Strand, and rushed upstairs three at a time.

‘Better wire to our Windsor correspondent, and send a reporter to the Lord Chamberlain's office,’ he suggested.

Meanwhile, in the composing room the burly head-printer, hearing the news, continued eating his lunch undisturbed, merely ejaculating ‘Queen's dead. Turn the column-rules.’ The column-rules set upside down, it may be explained, causes the paper to appear striped in deep mourning. If the heavens had fallen, the head-printer would not have abandoned his lunch.

All was ready. Mr. Fownes, as chief sub-editor, had assumed the painful duty of writing the introduction to the

melancholy report, and had finished a dozen lines or so, commencing: 'It is with heartfelt regret that we are compelled to report,' etc. Rosmead had found, in a dusty cupboard, a column of stereotyped obituary, which had been kept there in readiness for the past decade, and the machines were being prepared to pour out their tons of copies of the paper, when into the sub-editor's room entered a short, dark man, carrying a black leather bag, the telegraph-inspector of the Exchange Telegraph Company.

All pounced upon him. His duty was to go the round of the London newspaper offices and see that the tapes were working properly.

'Look at this!' they cried, placing the telegram before him. 'Have you seen it on any other tape?'

The man looked at it, then glancing at them, burst out laughing.

'Well, what are you laughing at?' Rosmead cried indignantly. 'Come, we're wasting time. Other papers will be out before us.'

'Look here,' exclaimed the inspector, diving down into the basket where rejected telegraphic tapes were thrown, and taking out a small piece, which he held before them. Upon it were but four words, 'John Harker, coachman to——'

'You've only got half the message,' the inspector laughed. 'This is the first part, which has evidently been torn off and flung down before the second half came up. Surely the death of the Queen's coachman isn't such an extraordinary event?'

Everybody laughed immoderately. The inspector had saved the *Evening Telegraph* from being the laughing-stock of the world, for in a few more moments thousands of copies would have been selling in the London streets. The speaking-tubes were next instant at work, the orders

countermanded, and the head-printer, still eating his lunch, ejaculated, his mouth full of bread and cheese: 'Turn the rules back. Subs. have had a glass o' bitter, and it's made 'em drunk.'

Five minutes later, the office of that dignified and highly-respectable journal resumed its normal aspect.

As the months passed, Rosmead kept diligently at work, and had, by dint of toiling on, in face of Lena's ill-will and obstinacy, concluded a new novel dealing with life in the old town of Blois, where some of his childhood days had been spent. With success he had tried another firm of publishers, and as soon as it was issued, it was hailed on every hand as a masterly piece of fiction. Nearly all the morning papers reviewed it as a serious piece of work, and within a week there began to appear paragraphs about his birthplace, his education in the Quartier Latin, and his present occupation. In the literary columns of the other evening papers there were laudatory paragraphs, declaring that this book was one of the books of the season; that its first edition had been exhausted on the day of publication, and that, no doubt, his marvellously true picture of French middle-class life was due to his cosmopolitan parentage.

He had undoubtedly made a hit at last. This was proved by the fact that one or two 'At home' cards began to dribble in upon him, cards from hostesses who make a point of inviting notable novelists, artists, and musicians to their exclusive gatherings, for the delectation of their guests. It is a cheap way of providing entertainment of an afternoon, for most people like to meet the writer of a book they have read and admired, even though the author may be a very disappointing, matter-of-fact person in the flesh.

Thus was Bertram bidden to the drawing-rooms of Kensington and Belgravia. He received letters expressing

admiration of his work, and asking for his autograph, applications for his photograph from editors of illustrated journals, while commissions for short stories began to come in unsolicited.

Even this did not cause Lena the slightest gratification. She saw that he alone was invited to the houses of the rich, that his success meant her elevation beyond her present sphere, and she declared that she hated the ways of what she termed 'grand society.' Her tastes lay in the direction of a low Strand bar, where she could sip that infusion of logwood and alcohol sold under the name of port, nibble a biscuit, and listen to the broad remarks of the unfortunate women about her. To her, an evening at a respectable house was a trial, unendurable if there was not sufficient to drink. But whenever whiskey made its appearance on any table, she never failed to disgrace him by helping herself to half a tumblerful.

In these invitations Rosmead saw a means of advancement. The author who avoids society hides his light beneath a bushel, and remains unknown. To the popular author, as to the actor, advertisement is everything in these degenerate days of boom and bunkum. If he looks in at Mrs. So and So's 'At home,' the fact is duly chronicled in next week's *Lady's Pictorial*, as well as in the *Morning Post* of the following day; if he attends a public dinner, his name is placed among the guests; and if he has the gift of public speaking, he will have a heading all to himself in the morning papers, such as 'Mr. Scrivener on Modern Fiction.' Self-advertisement is the secret of all success in modern literature. It is by this necessity of posing in society that the modern novelist, in so many instances, becomes vain, egotistical, and even insufferable among his own set. Any writer of fiction can count a score of men, mostly second-rate, who were once good fellows, but who

are now consumed by their own conceit, and fancy that the mantle of Scott or Dickens has fallen upon them. To such men the cheap puff is their very life. They would black the boots of the editor of the chief literary journal in return for a review (with extracts) of their last book, and will take a thousand-mile railway journey in order that their names may appear in the list of guests at some notable function. At the opening of free libraries and institutes they speak with a dramatic modulation of the voice, and descant, with many grand phrases and a Greek quotation or two, upon the future of literature, not forgetting to have type-written copies of their speech ready to hand down to the reporters at the close.

But these are not the Bohemians of literary London. A man who is a Bohemian at heart remains ever so, no matter what success may come to him. He chafes beneath the trammels of society, he abhors the silk hat and frock coat, and soon longs for the old free life of long ago, when his jacket was threadbare, his stomach empty, and his heart was light. Rosmead was one of the latter. He only accepted these invitations because Teddy advised him; because he saw that, without a little self-advertisement, he must remain unknown.

‘Trot about a bit, old chap,’ the artist had said when he consulted him. ‘You’ll get known, and people will buy your books and order them from the libraries. It shows that you’re a coming man, and that your real boom has at last begun. Buy a dress-suit and a diamond shirt-stud, and go into society now and then. It will do you good, and you’ll pick up lots of local colour that you may use later on. Keep your eye to the main chance, my dear fellow, as I do. Never mind what Lena says.’

So he took his old friend’s advice, and, while slaving away by day in that close, stuffy sub-editor’s den in his

ragged office coat, often unshaven and unkempt, he at night appeared, smart and spruce, in faultless attire, in West-end drawing-rooms, where he was lionised as the latest novelist, and where gushing women took him into cosy-corners, and treated him to their inane discourses upon the books they liked best, and the plays which had created an impression upon them.

CHAPTER XIV

' IN THE SWIM '

ROSMEAD had already written four books, three of which had been distinct successes, when one day he received a terrible and staggering blow.

His publisher had failed.

Such intelligence was sufficient to crush hope from the heart of any man. For years he had toiled, struggled, and striven, and now, just when he expected substantial cheques for the profits on his books, the company was unable to discharge its liabilities. He consulted the editor of a literary journal, a kind-hearted and firm friend, who was a barrister and authority on all matters of copyright, and from him learned that his position was even graver than he expected. His agreements with these publishers had been for half profits, and giving them the exclusive right to print and publish the books in England, therefore the company had half share in the books, and the latter could neither be reprinted nor withdrawn from the company.

The plain truth was that he was compelled to abandon all his previous work as valueless.

True, he had established a reputation, one that increased daily, for he was now contributing to the best magazines in England and America, and scarcely a day passed without some mention being made of him or his work in one or other of the thousand provincial journals. His books were sought after at the libraries, gossiped about at dinner-

tables, and criticised by that gang of superior critics which appears to centre around the office of the Board of Trade. For the past year he had anonymously reviewed his fellow authors' works in an important literary journal, and was now asked to sign his criticisms, a fact which showed that he had at length obtained a foothold in literature. He had been elected a member of the Savage upon Teddy's proposal, and had joined a fashionable West-end club, where smart society gathered in the private theatre on Sunday evenings to listen to concerts by music-hall artists.

Yet he had striven in vain. All was to no purpose, and with Lena's grumbling and words of derision ever in his ears, he was compelled still to edit the day's news at the *Evening Telegraph*.

Only the working journalist, the man shut up in a close, stuffy room through the hot summer days, with the whirr-click-click-click of half-a-dozen tapes eternally in his ears, the thousand and one items of the day's news passing through his mechanical brain, the odour of printer's ink and damp paper ever in his nostrils, to-morrow's work commencing ere to-day's is done; only the man whose lot in life is to dole out the world's news to the expectant public six times daily knows the rush, monotony, and terrible brain-tear of life within the office of a London evening newspaper.

To Rosmead, the weariness of life in London through those long, breathless August days grew unendurable. He longed, irresponsible wanderer that he was, to get away to peace and to green fields, and would often leave his chambers half-an-hour earlier in the morning in order to stroll about Covent Garden market and sniff that breath of the country borne in by the flowers. Even the smell of the vegetables was to him refreshing in that weary, jaded, depressed frame of mind, with the dust of London over his heart.

With the failure of his publishers he felt much inclined to throw up the sponge. He had written fiction and obtained a fair reputation, but his monetary gains had been paltry indeed, averaging some fifty pounds a year. He had heard of a literary agent, a man whose respectability and probity stood so high that all the most popular novelists entrusted to him the whole management of their affairs. He sold their work, drew up their agreements, collected their royalties, arranged for the securing of American copyrights, and acted as adviser to his clients. In desperation Rosmead sought his aid.

He found a set of handsome, business-like offices, with clerks and typewriters, and was ushered into a small, rather bare waiting-room, the walls of which were embellished with one or two choice engravings,—a room in which many an expectant author has waited to have audience with Mr. Howden, the King of Fiction; an apartment which the majority of latter-day novelists—and of publishers, for the matter of that—are well acquainted with. A few minutes later he was shown into a private room, and found himself in presence of a tall, grey-bearded elderly man, of refined, courteous manner, who spoke low, and listened attentively to Rosmead's story. Around this room were large portraits of popular authors, signed and framed, souvenirs from his clients, for, as is well-known in literary London, Mr. Howden, by acting as an impartial go-between between author and publisher, had succeeded in doubling, trebling, and even quadrupling an author's earnings. In pursuing his just and upright course, much hostile criticism had, of course, been directed against him by minor publishers, who were jealous that the author should obtain his fair share of profits; but respectable and responsible publishers were his friends, while the small set grew furious at the simple mention of his name. Not-

withstanding that, through the past decade he, with his son as partner, had lived down criticism, and now held control of the whole fiction market. Through that office passed nearly the whole of the manuscripts of well-known writers; therefore publishers, when they wanted a book by a certain author, applied to Mr. Howden for it. Such is the mode of modern literary business.

In his quiet, pleasant manner the confidential agent gave Rosmead some frank and sound advice as to future enterprises. He had, he said, watched his visitor's work, had noticed his steady progress, and concluded by expressing his readiness to act on his behalf.

'You have already established the groundwork of a reputation, Mr. Rosmead,' the courtly agent said. 'And it shall be my very best endeavour to further your interests, and to place your next book with some responsible firm at a fair royalty. Of course, you must advance by degrees, but you are not an amateur; the excellency of your work is known, therefore, the difficulties of disposing of future work are small.'

'I am still engaged in journalism, and I'm anxious to leave it,' Rosmead declared.

'Then my advice to you is remain where you are,' answered Mr. Howden, promptly. 'Continue for the present the course you are pursuing. Then, when I succeed in making contracts ahead for you, you can leave London, live in the country, and do some really good work. Remain patient, and you will succeed.'

With these words, uttered in a low, refined voice, still ringing in his ears, Bertram Rosmead went out into the bustling Strand, again hopeful, lighthearted, and eager. He had entered in despair, fearing that he was not of sufficient importance to become one of Mr. Howden's clients, but had left full of renewed courage for the fierce

strife of literary life. The agent of the greatest novelists of the day was now his agent. To have Mr. Howden to conduct one's affairs was hall-mark of one's standing among writers of contemporary fiction.

He went home and related to Lena his interview with the agent, and its gratifying result, but his wife only expressed disbelief in all agents, and smiled contemptuously.

'You're anxious to leave London, and to live in the country,' she said. 'Well, when you do so, I shall remain here. I had quite enough of Hounslow. I'll never be buried alive again.'

'Very well,' he sighed.

'Besides,' she added, 'if you leave London, you won't be able to go to those "At homes" you love so much. You go there only to flirt with a lot of women who fancy you're a great genius. You're getting to be a swell with two-pence in your pocket.'

'Surely there's no occasion to insult me, Lena,' he answered, with some asperity. 'I know well that you care nothing for my interests, but even in face of that I shall continue to strive. In the past you've discouraged me with all your cruel, unsympathetic words, but I am, nevertheless, determined to take Howden's advice. The failure of my publishers is a blow indeed, but I'll not yet despair. I'll commence once again, with hope for better fortune.'

And Lena laughed, a dry, contemptuous laugh, as she always did when unable to reply to his sound arguments.

From that day he re-commenced the struggle as eagerly as he had begun it, caring nothing for the sneers in the office of the *Evening Telegraph*, or for his wife's constant ill-will and penchant for spirits.

In most other men, all sense of refinement would have been dulled by Lena's eternal ill-temper, her ignorance,

and her fondness for everything low and vulgar; but he fought against it, schooling himself to regard her with apathy, and to take no heed of her reproaches, her scorn, or her insults. His life was very unhappy and lonely, for with such a wife he could make no friends, and could invite no one to his home. Yet he found now, as he had done even in the early days of his marriage, solace in his work and comfort in his own deep thoughts.

Many have said that the wild rush of journalistic life unfits the man who desires to become a novelist, as it destroys all powers of originality. On the contrary, however, Rosmead, sitting in his close, noisy room, found about him much that was stimulating and worth studying, much that would be of use to him in the future. Some characters in London journalism of to-day are distinctly unique, and if Dickens were still alive, would certainly be handed down to posterity. For example, there is not a pressman in Fleet Street who is not acquainted with that round, merry-faced, fair-bearded, comfortably-built man known as ‘Bishop’ Crook. The reason for this ecclesiastical appellation is because Mr. Crook’s speciality is the supply of church news to all and sundry of the London papers, and be it a consecration, a diocesan squabble, or a Church Congress, Mr. Crook contracts with every sub-editor in London to supply a condensed or full report, as ordered. Although he writes learnedly upon ecclesiastical matters, hob-nobs with bishops, and spends many hours in the cosy libraries of deans, canons, and other notabilities of the Church, he is the reverse of sanctimonious. In Fleet Street he freely expresses his opinions in rather forcible language on the Church in general, and on bishops in particular.

Indeed, on one occasion, when he called to interview the late Archbishop of Canterbury upon some important

subject, the good-humoured primate, having heard of Mr. Crook's contempt for all bishops, said :

‘How is it, Mr. Crook, that, although you are so sympathetic in your writings, you nevertheless hold such a bad opinion of us?’

‘Well, m’lord,’ answered the ever-ready Crook, ‘the fact is, that if I call upon a dean, a canon, or any of the smaller fry, I generally get a very appreciable glass of old port. But when I call upon a bishop or an archbishop, refreshment never makes an appearance. Men from Fleet Street have thirsty souls.’

The archbishop laughed.

‘Fleet Street and the Church are like oil and water — eh?’ he observed, at the same moment touching the bell, a summons which was instantly answered by the butler.

‘In future,’ said his lordship, addressing the man, ‘whenever Mr. Crook calls, see that he has a glass of the best port — the very best, remember.’

‘Yes, m’lord,’ answered the servant, and withdrew.

‘H’m,’ grunted Crook, in his beard, as was his habit, when anything gave him satisfaction.

‘You see, Crook,’ observed his lordship, ‘even archbishops aren’t such bad fellows, after all, are they?’

And ever after that, even to this day, it is a joke against the merry purveyor of ecclesiastical intelligence, whenever he has called at the ‘Cheshire Cheese,’ the ‘Rainbow,’ ‘Short’s,’ the Ludgate-station bar, the ‘Romano’s,’ the ‘Marble Halls,’ or any of those houses of refreshment where journalists most do congregate, that he has ‘called to see the Archbishop.’

Another man with whom Rosmead became intimately acquainted was old Mr. Wyatt, the reporter at the Central Criminal Court, a man who, although now dead, with his son reigning in his stead, was known to every London

journalist on account of his extraordinary eccentricities. He was nearly seventy, rather deaf, and much addicted to the snuff habit. Since the year of grace 1830 he had sat in his small box, reporting criminal cases for all the London papers, and was the special representative of the Press admitted to all executions in Newgate. Having known the judges in the days when they practised as young barristers in that court, and having watched the career of every member of the bar who frequented the Old Bailey, he was allowed considerable licence.

His worst habits, however, were those of taking snuff, causing frequent explosions in court, and of speaking in very loud tones whatever he had to say. For instance, if the judge was solemnly pronouncing sentence upon a murderer, a loud voice would arise in court with the words —

‘Now then, look sharp, boy, or you won’t catch this edition of the *Pall Mall*. Take a ’bus. It’ll only cost a penny, and this murder’s worth it.’

His lordship, however, would only glance at him severely, and even the usher had orders not to cry him down. For years they had all tried to make him speak lower, but to no avail, so the court was very often convulsed by old Wyatt’s quaint and pointed remarks to himself. Sometimes, when the court was breathless in expectancy, he would observe aloud: ‘I wonder when we’re going to have lunch?’ Or he would bend over to a colleague, and say, ‘I could do with a cold gin, couldn’t you?’ Whereat bar and public would be convulsed with laughter, and his lordship had considerable difficulty in preserving his own gravity.

He was very fond, too, of advising the judge what sentence he should pass, impatiently ejaculating such words as, ‘Oh! give him five years,’ ‘Six months ’ll be a lesson,’ or ‘First Offenders Act.’ Indeed so well versed was he in

criminal law, and such a long experience had he of the ways of the Recorder, that many times he wrote down the sentence, and finished his report, long before sentence had been pronounced. He was one of the most notable characters in journalism, but, like others, he has now passed away, although his memory will linger long in every newspaper office, both for his execrable handwriting, and for his personal eccentricities.

Again, among the wreckage of journalism, that shambling, shabby brigade whom drink, illness, or ill-fortune have placed beyond the pale, and who earn a precarious livelihood as 'liners,' Rosmead found much to study. Drink was the cause of the degradation and poverty of the majority. Many who had occupied good positions on first-class papers were now only too glad to supply a paragraph of a street accident for a shilling, while others scoured London hourly to seek something worth writing about. One man, a good-hearted fellow, who, although he dressed shabbily, and was down at heel, yet expended all his money upon his wife and children, made a speciality of supplying a paragraph daily to all the evening papers descriptive of the weather, and actually made a living out of it, while the speciality of another was the reporting of aristocratic marriages, at the rate of half-a-crown a wedding. He was known as 'Orange Blossoms,' on account of his nose, which, ruddy and pimply, bore outward and visible signs of frequent libations of hot rum.

Amid these surroundings, in a strange little world utterly unknown to the London public, Bertram Rosmead lived and worked, ever observant, ever gauging the character of these men around him, mechanically performing his duties, but always with the hope that ere long he might leave that wild whirl of life and bustle, and be free to devote his time to the profession he loved.

As autumn again gave place to winter, he found invitations still increasing, one which pleased him most being a plain correspondence-card with address embossed in crimson, whereon was written —

‘Mrs. St. Barbe at home. Thursday, November 8, 9.30 P.M.’

Of all the cards he had received, even though some of his hostesses bore titles, none gave him such complete satisfaction as this. Literary London knows well the monthly ‘At homes’ given in winter by that genial traveller, novelist, and critic, Francis St. Barbe, and how in his flat at Kensington one meets everybody in literature who is anybody. Indeed, every person bidden to St. Barbe’s has ‘done something,’ is a great writer, a great traveller, a great scientist, a great actress, or a great critic. Therefore, to receive a card was in itself a distinction. For over a year he had been a fellow-contributor with St. Barbe to the literary journal for which he reviewed, and although they had met several times, he had received no invitation until that day.

Rosmead went, and as he closed the door of his chambers, a half-drunken curse from Lena’s lips was hurled after him. She had acquired the habit of drinking whiskey at all hours of the day, and often by seven or eight in the evening was in a maudlin condition. In reply to her demand that he should take her to a music-hall, he had refused, pointing out how essential it was that he should go to the St. Barbés’, whereupon she had flown into a rage, cursed him and his work, using all the foul expressions picked up in the theatre dressing-room. Night after night, in order to keep her quiet and obtain rest himself, he had taken her to music-hall after music-hall, sitting out the performances, though bored to death; but even that had not satisfied her. Anything which might advance him she hated. Madly jealous of any

attention shown him by his hostesses, she grew furious whenever he accepted an invitation, and poured forth upon him torrents of abuse, interspersed with the vilest of curses upon his work and all that concerned him.

With a sigh, he walked quickly to the Temple Station, and took train to Addison Road, half-an-hour later entering the St. Barbes' flat. So crowded was it, even to the very door, by a well-dressed, distinguished throng, that it was with considerable difficulty he discovered his host. None of the rooms were large, but in all were books, mostly review-copies, in rows upon rows, signed portraits of celebrities, and curios of all sorts; while the gay, chattering crowd included nearly every writer of note at that moment in London. As he gazed around, he recognised the men and women about him by their portraits in illustrated papers and shop windows, for here once every month the literary set assembled to talk shop and scandal, to sip claret-cup, eat sandwiches, and depart at two or three in the morning. It was always a happy evening, for St. Barbe was a particularly good host, introduced everybody, and was never tired of lending a helping hand to young authors who had distinguished themselves. Indeed, to know St. Barbe was to have a friend, for he was on good terms with everybody.

Among those who crowded the flat, so that there was scarcely breathing space, were men and women whose names were household words wherever the English tongue was spoken: the latest traveller, a sallow man, who had just returned from Thibet, the latest artist, and the latest scientist; while after midnight there came the latest actor and the most renowned actresses, who brought with them the latest and most admired of the younger *débutantes*. The crowd was a very mixed one, but there was not a person there who was not interesting. St. Barbe made it a rule to

exclude outsiders, even though they might be wives of millionaires. No London hostess could gather such a distinguished crowd as he gathered about him.

Rosmead was cordially greeted by his host, but so great was the chatter and loud the laughter, that he could scarcely make himself heard, and a moment later found himself introduced to a dark-haired, full-bearded man, of almost gigantic stature, a renowned Scotch novelist, whose name was at that moment on everybody's lips. The pair commenced to chat, the good-humoured Scotchman observing that he had read and admired Rosmead's last book, a fact which to Bertram was exceedingly gratifying; then together they sought a place against the wall where they could lean and talk.

‘This is the first time I've been here,’ the great writer remarked presently, with a strong Scotch accent, as he gazed around at the throng of well-dressed women and rather spruce-looking men, for those who are on St. Barbe's visiting list affect smartness of attire rather than cultivate its artistic negligence. In the mode of wearing their hair alone were they outwardly distinguishable from any other crowd in any other London drawing-room.

‘It's also my first visit,’ Bertram answered.

‘Then until to-night,’ observed the leader of the so-called ‘kailyard school,’ ‘we were among the great unknown.’

‘I was, and still am,’ said Bertram. ‘You, however, have a reputation wider, perhaps, than anyone in this room.’

‘Well,’ said the novelist, laughing merrily, ‘I may be known here and there, but I'm not much the better for it, I'm afraid. Reputation is but a bitter fruit of labour, for it only makes a man vain, discontented, and egotistical.’

At that instant a woman, leaning on the arm of an elderly, rather distinguished-looking, thin-faced, grey-haired

man, brushed past Bertram, her perfumed chiffons almost touching his face, and in doing so, she gazed for an instant into his face.

For one brief moment their eyes met, and Bertram Rosmead started in amazement. Next second he stood rigid, speechless, petrified.

CHAPTER XV

THE SECRET OF A DAY

FOR a single instant only she paused, gazing at Rosmead with a startled, half-fearful look in her luminous eyes, then passed on, leaning upon the arm of her companion. From the crown of her well-dressed hair, with its diamond-edged comb, to the tip of her pointed grey suède shoe she was graceful and *chic*, her perfect figure well set off by her gown of black silk trimmed with silver, her rounded arms and neck showing white as alabaster.

‘Pretty woman, that — very pretty,’ remarked the Scotch novelist, observing the look of recognition she had given his companion. ‘Do you know who she is?’

Rosmead held his breath, but in a moment recovered his self-possession.

‘No,’ he answered, somewhat harshly. ‘But I know who she was.’

‘Who she was!’ he exclaimed. ‘That sounds interesting. Who was she?’

‘I knew her in Paris,’ Rosmead answered. ‘Her name is Fosca Farini,’ and as he uttered those words, his eyes followed her graceful figure, and he saw her pass into the small inner room, which, leading from the drawing-room, was decorated as a Moorish lounge.

‘How smart she is!’ repeated the novelist. ‘Devilish pretty woman. French, I suppose?’

‘No, Italian.’

Then at that moment Teddy O'Donovan, a well-known attendant at these gatherings, approached, and commenced to chat. He had painted a portrait of the Scotch novelist, which had been hung, therefore they were not strangers, and the conversation very soon turned upon pictures.

'Some day,' the novelist said, 'I hope my publishers will give you one of my *éditions de luxe* to illustrate.'

'I shall be delighted,' the artist answered. 'Let them give me plenty of time, for I'm always full up six months in advance, as you know. But I'll try and do some good pictures for you.'

Then, turning to Rosmead, he exclaimed —

'Who do you think is here? You'll never guess.'

'I know already,' Bertram replied, in a strange, hard tone. '*She* is here.'

'And the Marquis,' added the artist.

'The Marquis!' his friend exclaimed, in surprise.

'Yes. They're both here. How they came to be invited, or where they've sprung from, Heaven alone knows; but it's a solemn fact. And after all this time, too! Have you seen her?'

'She's in there,' answered Bertram, indicating the Moorish room, and during this discourse they became separated from the Scotch novelist by the chattering throng.

'Well, I never thought either of us would meet her again,' Teddy said. 'It's most extraordinary. She looks in pretty easy circumstances, too. Married, perhaps, old chap, and settled down after her little escapade. Girls often do.'

'Perhaps,' his old friend acquiesced, his eyes still upon the door, where the crowd passed and re-passed.

'Go in and speak to her. It'll do no harm. She treated you beastly shabbily; but let bygones be bygones. There's Jimmy Slade, the dramatic critic, over there, and I

want to get a couple of stalls for the Savoy from him. So tra-la-la,' and a moment later the irrepressible painter had vanished among the gay, laughing crowd.

Bertram stood for a moment in hesitation, still pressed against the wall by the throng, which seemed each moment to increase, till the rooms were crowded to suffocation, and starched collars sank as damp rags. He still wondered which was the best course to pursue. Quickly, however, he decided to seek her, and demand an explanation of that day, long past, when she left him, and sent that cruel letter which had wrecked his life. With that object he went on, pressed forward by those behind.

As he passed the door and entered the Moorish room, he saw, straight before him, a lounge against the wall, with a canopy of yellow silk above it, a covering which shut out the light of the shaded arabesque hanging lamps, rendering it almost dark within. Alone in the deep shadow sat Fosca, a striking figure in black and silver.

She was awaiting him. Her face was white in eagerness and expectancy; her dark eyes seemed to him to burn with all the fire of her old love of long ago.

He approached, simply uttering her name in a hoarse, low voice —

‘Fosca!’

He tried to utter some word of welcome, but was tongue-tied. In that half-darkness she sat there, an almost weirdly handsome figure, the typical heroine of his last romance, beautiful of feature, graceful in every line. In her black hair the diamond comb alone caught the light, and glowed with a thousand iridescent fires.

‘Bertram! At last!’ she exclaimed in French, in a low voice, her white breast heaving and falling quickly beneath its lace. ‘I—I feared lest you would not come to me — that you still hated me.’

‘And why should I come?’ he inquired, finding tongue at last, as he sank on the soft divan beside her. ‘The love that once existed between us is long ago dead. Is it not best that it should be buried once and for ever?’

She glanced at him for a single instant, and even in that half light he saw tears glistening in her eyes.

‘Yours is not an enthusiastic welcome,’ she said sadly, in a harsh voice, half choked by emotion.

‘I do not welcome you,’ he answered coldly. ‘We have met only by accident, and this encounter is painful.’

‘If to you,’ she said, ‘then the more so to me. You no doubt believe that in the years that have passed since those old days at the Louvre I have forgotten. But I tell you, Bertram, I have ever remembered you. I have heard long ago of your success as a novelist, but I feared to write to you or see you, because——’

‘Because,’ he repeated, remembering the pure and affectionate intercourse once existing between them, ‘because you treated me so cruelly. Well, what of your lover?’ he asked, growing excited.

‘My lover?’ she echoed, with a puzzled look.

‘The man in whose company you left Paris,’ he said, in a tone of intense bitterness. ‘The man who posed as my friend, yet was my enemy.’

‘Ah! you mean Jean,’ she cried. ‘Of course. I see it now. You believe that I actually left Paris with him; that I had fallen so low as to deceive you like that. Yes, yes, I made a fatal mistake in writing that heartless, foolish letter. You will never believe me if I tell you that I did not leave Paris with Jean; that, being forced to fly from Paris, I made that excuse to you in order that you, who loved me so well, should believe me worthless and forget. No. You cannot believe me, Bertram, I know.’

He looked at her incredulously. The hum and laughter

of many voices filled his ears, but half hidden there as he was, no one could see him distinctly.

‘You wish me to believe this?’ he asked. ‘To believe that you actually wrote that letter without loving Jean, and without any intention of leaving Paris with him?’

‘I ask you to still trust me, Bertram,’ she said in deep earnestness, her eyes fixed upon his with unwavering glance. ‘I have spoken the truth.’

‘Impossible,’ he exclaimed impatiently. ‘It is useless to seek to excuse yourself in this manner.’

‘You accompanied Jean to the station,’ she observed. ‘I was not there.’

‘You might have been in another carriage, or have left by another train,’ he retorted quickly, for he was angry that she should even now seek to deceive him in this lame manner.

She sighed deeply.

‘I had dreaded this always,’ she exclaimed, shuddering slightly. ‘I felt certain that you could never accept my explanation.’

‘But you do not explain,’ he declared. ‘You do not tell me why you were compelled to leave Paris.’

‘No,’ she replied, after a second’s hesitation. ‘That’s impossible.’

‘Why?’ he inquired, surprised at her sudden change of manner, for in that moment she had grown strangely pallid and haggard, as if striving to hide from him some terrible, ever-oppressing secret within her heart.

‘The reason why I left Paris is known only to myself,’ she faltered.

‘And you decline to tell me?’ he remarked.

‘It is impossible to explain,’ she answered quickly, her face blanched, her eyes shining upon him with that strange inner love-light he so well remembered. Years had not dimmed his memory of the pink glow of those calm sum-

mer evenings when they strolled together in the Tuileries Gardens, or of those sunny afternoons in the Bois, when they sat together in peaceful solitude and indulged in the pleasant day-dreams of youth. She was more beautiful now than then, more *chic*, more refined, more graceful. In that instant, as their eyes met, the truth was forced upon him that he still loved her. But reflecting upon the lameness of her excuse, and of the strangeness of her secret, he was filled with doubt.

‘If you will not tell me the truth,’ he said gravely, ‘it is impossible for me to believe you. I have still your letter in which you renounce your love for me, and tell me that you have left Paris with Jean. The truth was,’ he added, with intense bitterness, ‘that you were aware I had no money, while Jean was rich and able to provide you with luxuries. Life at the Louvre was irksome — you told me so hundreds of times — and seeing in him a mode of quitting it, you did so. It is the same always. Women love for money.’

‘No,’ she protested fiercely. ‘I do not love for money. I should still have loved you, Bertram, had you been in rags. I own that my actions were mysterious, that the letter I wrote you was sufficient in itself to cause you to hate me; but could you know the whole of the true facts, you would never utter those words — words which rend my heart.’

‘Why are you not frank?’ he inquired reproachfully. ‘Surely there is no secret of your past that I must not know?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, in a low, strained voice, ‘there is a secret — one which I must still keep from everyone, even from you. I left Paris — I was forced to leave by a strange combination of circumstances; but I swear that I went alone, that from the moment when you and I were together

in the studio the last time, I have never, until this instant, met Jean Potin. I swear that,' and she paused, looking him full in the face. 'I swear on the tomb of my dead mother that I have ever loved you, Bertram, and have thought of no other man.'

'And you ask me to believe all this?' he exclaimed, with a smile of undisguised cynicism. 'Even with your letter still preserved?'

'Yes,' she answered simply. 'I ask you to believe me, because I tell you the truth.'

'Yet you conceal from me your motive?'

'I must,' she answered. 'It is imperative. Will you never believe me?'

He hesitated. His mind was overshadowed by doubt.

'I cannot believe you, Fosca,' he replied at last, drawing a deep breath.

Again she sighed. The tears standing in her eyes showed how deeply in earnest she was, how great was the tumult of emotion within her. In that brief hour all his old passion for her had returned. He compared his peevish, drunken, ignorant wife with her, and the comparison was odious. Yet her explanation was insufficient to satisfy him. She was hiding from him some secret which, in order to place credence in her story, it was necessary for him to know. Thoughts such as these surged through his brain, and he felt himself wavering. Suddenly, from the depths of his being, he felt a delicious freshness arise, like the vague advent of some new faith, and his hand sought hers.

At that instant, however, their host came along, and poking his head beneath the canopy, cried cheerily —

'Ah, mademoiselle! I've been hunting everywhere for you — and for you, too, Rosmead. I want to introduce you to Monckton, who is one of our fellow-reviewers — a

man you ought to know, and a great admirer of your books. Wait a moment,' and that indefatigable centre of this London literary circle carried off Fosca, ere he could utter a word.

But a few moments later his host returned and took him to where Monckton, the well-known reviewer, was standing.

Everybody in that room knew Monckton, the thin-faced young man with fair hair which, although it bore painful traces of having been waved artificially, was the special admiration of ladies. He was clean-shaven, narrow-jawed, with a pair of fine eyes that any woman might have envied, and a face so peculiarly effeminate that one of his witty enemies, whose book he had criticised adversely, had once referred to him as 'the young man whom the Creator had intended as a lady's maid.' He was not a brilliant man by any means, but that little circle of 'boomers,' the dozen or so friends who push each other into notoriety by means of advertisement, had admitted him to their set a year ago, and now his name was known throughout the length and the breadth of the land. Indeed, with his striking personality, his affected manners, and his drawling speech, he was a fair specimen of the literary product of the present age; a man who, by writing a little indifferent poetry and criticising other people's work with a profound scholarly air, had forced people to believe in his capabilities. True, he had published a book or two of lyrics in the manner of most spring poets, but they had only been remarkable for the extraordinary merit which his friends alone discovered in them. Whenever he published a book, the reviews were more laudatory than those of a collection by the Laureate, and whenever he spoke at public dinners, which was pretty frequently, the morning papers would invariably appear with the head-line 'Mr. Monckton on Poetry,' as if he were a

recognised authority. He was a shining light, too, of a club which his friends had started for mutual admiration, and for the purposes of advertisement, a club called after an Oriental poet of the past, whose name, being almost unpronounceable, impressed the ignorant public. This select *coterie* of log-rollers, who dined once or twice a year, and heralded their dinners by many preliminary puff paragraphs, always made a point of inviting important editors, because the latter would 'boom' them in return for their invitation to the seven-and-sixpenny dinner.

A strange little world is Literary London. How little the public know of it, notwithstanding the 'Literary gossip' of every newspaper.

The Sette of Odd Volumes, the Cemented Bricks, the Argonauts, and the New Vagabonds are all similar clubs, but are more catholic in membership, and do not so openly advertise themselves, nor are their members so painfully wanting in genuine Bohemianism as this charmed circle of poets, minor critics, and indifferent novelists who dribble out little books and puny poems on subjects theological. If a minor writer chances to be particularly friendly with a couple of members it is sometimes decided to 'boom him,' or in other words cram him down the public throat. With that object he is invited to the next dinner, and then around go the ingeniously-worded paragraphs that 'Mr. So-and-So, whose last book "Pants" attracted so much attention both here and in America, and whose new study of slum life is just ready, has been invited as guest, &c.' The papers, from literary reviews to gutter-journals, print them eagerly; the public, who have never heard of 'Pants,' ask for it at the libraries, and very quickly Mr. So-and-So 'booms,' his advertisement being continued by the report of the dinner, wherein the happy guest is referred to as 'the new Scott,' or the writer 'whose

romances have been declared by more than one critic to be worthy to rank with those of Dickens.'

Mushroom reputations such as these last for a year or so, and then die down until, in publishers' parlance, they are 'dead uns.' Once, indeed, this little company of log-rollers had actually 'boomed' a man who had never written anything more noteworthy than a few short stories in a boys' paper, and whose novel had been refused by every publisher in London. Dozens of artificial reputations are manufactured in this way annually. Men who have struggled on for years and years doing good, honest work, work that would rank far in advance of these Jack-in-the-Box geniuses, are left behind in this race for fame, because they will not condescend to play their own clarion. But to such the proclamations of the newly-arrived sound like tin whistles in an opera orchestra, for the sturdy plodder in literature knows well that the public, although it may be gulled at first by laudatory reviews, will soon allow the dull man who is thus thrust upon them to find his own level, a level from which he will never again ascend. In literature, as in business, a reputation once lost can never be regained.

Again, it is a striking fact in literary London that the more incompetent the writer the more vain he generally becomes. With one or two exceptions, perhaps, the popular writer is never a vain man. In most instances he is surprised at his own success, and, being so, cannot be egotistical. He leaves egotism to those clever young men with whose works his publisher fills up his list; men who earn about one twentieth part his income and to whose wives 'At homes' he is invited in order that he may be lionised.

The difference between Rosmead and Monckton was great. By dint of sheer toil the former had forced his

way forward into notoriety, while the reputation of the latter had been gained at the expense of a few midday chops at the Savage Club, one or two seven-and-sixpenny dinners at popular restaurants, with a few notices of books remarkable for adulatory phrases and 'lines for quotation.' The one was a romancer whose work showed talent of the highest order; the other an artificial poet whose lines were far from faultless, and whose moral teaching was somewhat dislocated.

Yet Monckton spoke to the man introduced to him with a languid, patronising air as if the effort of speaking to such a person was a bore. He raised his white, tapering hand, glanced at it, then resting his elbow in his palm, struck an attitude, intended to be imposing.

He began to praise Rosmead's last book, but with his words of approbation were mingled disparaging remarks regarding diction and grammar, in a manner which showed that he intended to impress him with a sense of his superiority. Monckton was nothing if not a superior person.

'I don't know that one need be so very particular in writing romance,' Rosmead answered, a trifle abruptly, his eyes fixed upon Fosca, who was at that moment chatting with much sprightly gesticulation to an elderly and distinguished R. A. 'What people want from a writer of romance is a good story, with an absorbing plot, and plenty of go in it. That's what I always try to produce.'

'But, my dear Rosmead,' drawled the sandy-haired poet, with a look of consternation, 'think of your style.'

'I'm not a grammarian,' answered Bertram, impatiently, for the man's affected superiority disgusted him. 'Not nine-tenths of my readers care a semi-colon for grammar; they want a story. If they want grammar they can buy "Lindley Murray."'

Both men laughed. Monckton saw that Rosmead was

too straightforward and plain. So confidently did people believe in him that it had become his habit to pronounce his own opinions on everything concerning literature, from the Baconian theory down to his own latest effort in puny verse. For a man to speak of grammar in that flippant manner horrified him.

‘The masters of fiction always paid great attention to style,’ he observed.

‘I’m not a master, and never shall be,’ Rosmead answered. ‘As long as I write an interesting story and the public buy me, I seek no further distinction,’ and as he spoke, a tall, thin, grey-moustached man brushed past him.

It was the Marquis.

The recognition was mutual. The man, who had been a shabby, penurious artist’s model in Paris, was now quite spruce and well-dressed, although by the manner in which his evening clothes hung upon him, it was evident he was not at home in them. His face was a trifle greyer than it had been in the days when Rosmead had lived on the Quai Montebello; his hair was thinner, and he had now shaved his beard, that hirsute appendage which had been the despair of so many artists.

‘Ah! Signor Rosmead!’ the old man gasped in surprise, as his eyes met Bertram’s.

‘Yes,’ the other answered in French, glad of an opportunity to escape from the superior person with whom he had been conversing. ‘So you are in London, Marquis?’

‘No, no,’ he laughed. ‘Marquis no longer. I’ve dropped my title.’

‘Why?’

‘Because suspicion always attaches to an Italian Marquis, except in his own country,’ he answered. ‘But how have you been all these years?’

Rosmead regarded the old man with a smile. Almost

involuntarily he placed his hand in his pocket, for he expected the aged model to crave the usual loan of thirty centimes. Farini's eyes were red and shifty, and his breath bore traces of the atmosphere of the refreshment-room.

'Oh, I'm all right,' Rosmead answered cheerfully. 'But how is it that we meet here? I thought you were always in Paris,' and he glanced inquiringly at the old Bohemian's sorry attempt at genteel garb.

'I've come with Fosca. She's here,' he explained.

'Yes,' the novelist replied briefly. 'I've been speaking with her. The Bouchon is here, too. Have you seen him?'

'The Bouchon?' cried the old Italian, enthusiastically. 'No, I haven't seen him. I've been all the evening in the other room,' he said, indicating the refreshment-room, 'in conversation with a gentleman. How is the Signore?'

'As merry as ever,' Bertram laughed.

'He's a great painter now, I hear,' the model said. 'My prophecy has come true. He was the only man at Julien's who could paint my forehead with any degree of accuracy. You know what a difficult forehead I've got. I've heard in Paris of his success in your Academy. And you?'

Bertram was explaining that he had given up painting and taken to writing fiction when, seeing Fosca left for a moment alone, he, crossing quickly to her, whispered —

'I've been waiting to get another word with you. First, why are you in London?'

'To seek you,' she answered, raising her fine eyes to his.

'How did you know I was here?'

'I read a paragraph about you in the *Petit Journal* a month ago. It said that you, Bertram Rosmead, now a successful writer of romance, had once studied art in the Quartier Latin, but, failing, had taken to literature, and now

lived in London. Then I knew it was my Bertram, and I came here,' she said simply.

He looked straight into her eyes for a single instant. Yes, he saw she was far more beautiful than in the old days. He had noticed how her elegant figure was being everywhere admired. But the crowd had now thinned, for it was past two o'clock, and everyone was saying good-night. As he stood talking with her, their host, hot after his exertions to make everyone acquainted with everybody else, approached them, exclaiming in good French —

‘Well, mademoiselle, I hope you haven’t been bored?’

‘Not at all,’ she replied, with a glance at the man beside her. ‘I’ve found here an old friend — a very old friend.’

‘Oh, you were acquainted, were you?’ he asked, addressing the novelist and laughing.

‘Yes, in Paris, long ago,’ he replied; and then, as his host moved away, he asked her for her address, in order that he might call upon her.

‘We’re staying at the Waterloo Hotel, in Jermyn Street,’ she answered. ‘When will you come?’

‘To-morrow, at three,’ he replied, after a second’s hesitation.

‘Very well,’ she said, as the Marquis came up to take charge of her. ‘Till then, good-bye;’ and in a low, earnest half-whisper she added, ‘Remember, what I have said is the truth. I swear it is. Reflect before you prejudge me.’

For a moment her tiny hand, in its long cream glove, rested in his. Then she turned and left him.

A quarter of an hour later he was driving along Kensington Gore towards his dingy Inn, her words still ringing in his ears. The night was chill and silent, the long rows of gas-lamps bright and brilliant. London was asleep beneath a very peaceful sky, which was studded with stars.

CHAPTER XVI

FRIENDS

‘I MISSED you last night, old fellow. Where did you get to?’ inquired Bertram, as he burst into Teddy’s studio early next morning. He had sent a note to the office excusing himself from duty that day, and had come down to Kensington on purpose to consult his friend.

‘I left early,’ the painter answered, casting himself into a chair, and throwing back his head upon the cushion behind. ‘I was at the Savage late on the night before, and felt a bit chippy. I saw you chatting with Fosca under the canopy — well, and the result?’

‘The result — eh? Well, the result is nothing.’

‘You’ve charged her with being unfaithful, and all that, I suppose?’

‘Yes, and she denies it,’ answered the novelist, sinking into a chair. ‘She declares that she never accompanied Jean, and that she wrote the letter merely because she wished me to believe her worthless.’

‘Then she loved somebody else, and wanted to get rid of you,’ observed Teddy, philosophically.

‘She swears she’s never loved anybody else.’

‘A lame excuse — a devilish lame excuse,’ Teddy grunted dubiously.

Bertram hesitated whether he should tell his friend everything. He could trust O’Donovan, who knew well the secret sorrow which oppressed his heart. Therefore

he resolved to narrate the facts as Fosca had related them.

‘She has told me a strange story,’ he said, his eyes fixed upon those of his friend. ‘She says that she was forced to leave Paris and to part from me. She loved me, yet it was imperative that we should separate; therefore she wrote that cruel letter, in order that I might cast her aside as unfaithful and worthless.’

‘Forced to leave Paris?’ echoed the O’Donovan. ‘Why?’

‘Ah! that’s just the point,’ Bertram answered, with a sigh. ‘She won’t explain.’

‘Suspicious,’ observed the other. ‘It’s impossible to place credence in a story such as that without a knowledge of the whole facts. If she really loved you, why didn’t she take you into her confidence? No, my dear fellow, if I were you I wouldn’t let the matter rest here. I’d make her tell me the truth. If she loves you she’ll tell you at last. Women are fond of affecting secrecy in such matters.’

‘It was such an extraordinary meeting,’ Bertram said, stretching himself in his chair. ‘She says that she read a paragraph about me in the *Petit Journal* and came to London expressly to seek me.’

‘I’m afraid that’s not quite true,’ Teddy answered. ‘Before leaving last night I made a remarkable discovery, one which fully accounts for the Marquis and Fosca being in London.’

‘What was it?’ inquired the other, eagerly.

‘Well, when I came across the Marquis in the crowd I fully expected him to pin me in a corner and extract the usual loan. But he didn’t; and a quarter of an hour later I learnt a most astounding fact. The Marquis is a rich man.’

‘A rich man! Has he at last inherited the family castle in Spain?’

‘No; it seems he’s dropped on his legs in a very remarkable way, even though a little late in life. You know he was always a pretty good musician. Well, it seems that in his younger days he was a violinist at La Scala Theatre, in Milan, and rose to be conductor of the orchestra there. A drinking bout was the cause of his services being dispensed with, and he went to Paris, but from that time sank lower and lower, until he became a model for the head, and as such we knew him. But in his sober moments, during the past few years, the old boy has composed an opera, a work which a year ago was produced in Vienna, and afterwards in Paris, where it met with such success that it has already been heard in all the European capitals.’

‘The Marquis has written an opera!’ cried Bertram, his eyes opening incredulously. ‘Never. What’s its title?’

‘“The Loaned Threepenny-Bit” would have been an apt one,’ laughed Teddy, ‘but its real title is “Il Parpaglione.”’

‘“Il Parpaglione!”’ gasped the other. ‘Why I saw it a week ago at Covent Garden. It’s magnificent. Half London raves over it, and seats are booked months in advance. Surely the Marquis didn’t compose that splendid music?’

‘He did, without doubt,’ Teddy replied, taking up the morning paper, and, pointing to the advertisement, handed it across to him. ‘There’s his name.’

Bertram looked and saw there true enough the announcement: ‘To-night at eight. Farini’s famous opera, “Il Parpaglione.”’

‘Why the profits from such a work must be enormous,’ he exclaimed, glancing again towards his friend.

‘I should rather think they were,’ Teddy replied. ‘Look what a run it’s had. I’m told that in Italy it’s played in two or three towns every night. The Italians have gone stark mad over it. Who would ever have dreamed that the “Threepenny Marquis” could do anything except drink a *bilboquet*, borrow thirty centimes and predict the future success or failure of the man to whom he sat for St. Peter. It’s truly astounding.’

‘But of course he was always a good musician,’ Bertram exclaimed. ‘I remember once when Bresson, of the orchestra at the Français, was in our rooms, and we induced the old chap to give us a tune on his mandolin, he declared that the Italian’s music was faultless. Don’t you remember you asked what song it was he had played, and he replied that it was one of his own, and we all laughed him to derision. The idea of that drunken old scamp composing a song was too absurd. Yet now we know the truth.’

‘Poor old Marquis! In those shabby down-at-heel days nobody believed in him any more than they did in us,’ Teddy observed. ‘He was too good a Bohemian ever to boast, or even refer to his own talents.’

‘Yet “Il Parpaglione” is the work of a master. Go and see it,’ urged Bertram.

‘I will. Already I’ve heard lots of the music,’ the artist answered. ‘For the past six months or so, every orchestra has had selections from it on their programme. It is splendid, and although I’m not a critic of music, seems to me to equal the best work of Verdi or Puccini.’

‘Yes, I entirely agree with you there. The Marquis is undoubtedly a genius. To think that his head should hang in the galleries as that of St. Peter! It’s too funny.’

‘I doubt whether the much-painted saint himself had a finer head,’ laughed Teddy. ‘He certainly didn’t possess such a capacious throat or so charming a daughter.’

‘Ah, Fosca!’ exclaimed his friend, his mind ever reverting to the woman he loved. ‘I’m going to call on her this afternoon.’

‘Then compel her to tell you everything. Clear up the mystery, or it will worry you to death. You were hard hit in those days, and you haven’t yet got over it.’

‘I shall never get over it, I fear, old fellow.’

The artist sighed. He knew that his friend, ever modest and sincere, spoke the truth. Fosca, the sprightly neat-ankled girl who had come like a ray of sunshine to brighten their shabby old studio, and had captivated them all in the old days on the Quai Montebello, was now, as the daughter of the distinguished composer, more graceful, more strikingly beautiful with her Parisian *chic*, her bright eyes and her musical laughter, than she had been when her face was rendered pale and haggard by long hours in the Magasins du Louvre. Teddy saw that in Rosmead all the old fire of love had been rekindled, that she was still his idol, even though she had once cast him aside in favour of a more wealthy lover, even though in his own bizarre home his peevish wife was fast drinking herself to death.

‘Don’t act rashly, old chap. That’s all my advice,’ the artist said.

‘I’m not likely to,’ his friend sighed. ‘You, Teddy, are the only man who knows my secret. To the world I’m a happy, successful man, whose reputation grows daily, and who has every prospect in life, but alas! at heart I’m one of the most wretched fellows on earth. Without comfort at home, without a single friend except yourself, I live on from year to year, growing every day more careless of the future, because it can only bring me vexation and sorrow. I have striven and fought for my standing in my profession until I have gained the mastery, but the result is only an empty name. There is no brightness in my home, or in

my heart, because mine has been a vain effort, its result a fruitless blank. Fame has come to me, but alas! at what bitter cost!' he added in the voice of a man over-burdened with poignant sorrow. Teddy was struck by his weary, dismal countenance, whence all life appeared to have been effaced by the long years of toil and disappointment.

'No, don't give up, my dear old fellow,' he cried, rising and placing his hand upon his friend's shoulder. 'One woman alone loves you and has your interests at heart. It is, however, not just that you should love her. Long ago I told you that Lena would be your ruin. She is worthless — absolutely worthless, and unfitted to be the wife of an honest straightforward man of your stamp.'

'Why do you say she is worthless?' asked Rosmead. 'Whenever you speak of her I always have a strange fancy you are in possession of some secret that you would like me to know. What is it?'

The artist hesitated, his eyes, with an unusually serious expression, fixed upon those of his friend.

'I say that she's unfit to be your wife, Bertram. I can say no more than that,' he answered very gravely.

'You advise me to abandon her?' he asked in a low voice.

'Yes. Come back to life — love, be a man.'

'To love Fosca instead?' he inquired with knit brows.

'I did not suggest that,' the artist replied, waving his hand in a vague way. 'No, I will not advise you to forsake your wife for a woman who has already played you false.'

'But Fosca's secret?' the novelist observed uneasily. Intense emotion was stirring him.

'Ascertain its nature. Then consider how you should act,' Teddy suggested. 'The ways of women are very strange. Even now she may be lying to you.'

‘No,’ he murmured bitterly, ‘I believe she speaks the truth. But I must not love her — I dare not.’

He was shaken by so frightful a sob that Teddy could not restrain his own tears. Their hands were clasped, their hearts full of the softest emotion. Could Bertram Rosmead have known the ghastly truth, he would have been struck by the nobility of soul which had lain for so long behind his friend’s anxiety.

But the death born of doubt had swept through him, shattering everything, and rendering his body but the sepulchre of all his hopes and aspirations, of all his energies, of all his love.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CUP OF PLEASURE

THE afternoon was chilly, and as Fosca sat over the fire in her cosy little sitting-room in the Waterloo Hotel, that essentially foreign hostelry in Jermyn Street, she shivered and drew her low chair nearer.

Suddenly the Marquis entered from the adjoining room, red in the face and fuming. He was coatless, and his hair was awry on account of a strenuous, but futile effort to button a very stiff collar.

‘Confound these laundry-women’s triumphs,’ cried the old man, in anger, speaking in Italian, as he always did when vexed. ‘I can’t button the thing.’

‘Oh, let me do it!’ exclaimed Fosca, jumping up and taking the refractory collar in her hand. ‘Poor babbo, you’re always in trouble over your clothes nowadays.’

‘*Madre di Dio!* Yours give you enough trouble, too,’ he snapped. ‘You’re always at the dressmaker’s, and I have to pay some very interesting bills.’

‘You know you always like to see me look very nice,’ she laughed. ‘Come, let me button your collar!’ and with a deft movement she fixed the stud in its place. ‘Shall I tie your cravat for you?’

‘No, no,’ he answered. ‘Only a man can tie a man’s bow properly. Holy Virgin! one has to pay dearly for a bit of success. In the old days I never wanted a collar, and I was far more comfortable without one.’

‘But we both often wanted a meal,’ Fosca observed a trifle gravely. ‘And if your success had come earlier poor mother might have been saved a lot of suffering.’

‘Ah, yes!’ sighed the great composer, growing grave in an instant at mention of his dead wife’s name. ‘Poor dear! If I had only had this success two or three years ago her life perhaps might have been saved by the great doctors. There is, alas, no help for the invalid poor. Monsieur Rosmead asked last night after her, and I was compelled to tell him the truth—that she was dead.’ Then suddenly breaking off, he added, ‘By the way, he’s going to call on you to-day, isn’t he?’

‘Yes, babbo; he’s due here now,’ she answered, hesitating slightly, her cheeks flushing.

‘Well, you must entertain him yourself,’ he replied. ‘I suppose in polite society, such as we are compelled nowadays to affect, it isn’t considered quite the thing for an unmarried woman to receive a gentleman. Yet you often went walks with him in Paris, young puss, and I suppose you still love him now, if the truth were told—eh?’

‘Why?’ she asked, with affected indifference.

‘The look on your face when you met him was quite sufficient to tell me the truth,’ answered the Marquis. ‘I’m old now, my dear, but I, too, was young once.’ And he sighed.

‘Poor babbo,’ she answered, looking at him gravely. ‘But you’re not very old! you’ll live years longer yet, and write lots more operas.’

‘No,’ he replied, with a touch of sadness. ‘I have no further ambition to write. One success, such as the “*Parpaglione*,” is sufficient. I shall never do anything better—never.’

‘Oh, yes, you will,’ cried his daughter, cheerily. ‘I’m sure you will. After this, we’ll go to Tuscany, to Lucca,

that grey, quaint old city where we stayed six months ago. There you can settle down to work again, and in easy circumstances. We'll have a nice villa with a terrace and a garden, with trailing vines and an arbour where we can dine together. It will be quite an ideal existence. I love the old place.'

'But you forget,' her father said, interrupting her, 'you forget that I'm a born Bohemian, and can't settle anywhere; you forget, too, that you may marry, and then I shall not want a villa. A couple of rooms off the "Boul. Mich." are good enough for me.'

'No, no,' Fosca answered quickly. 'I'll never allow you to go back there again. Remember who you are now — the most distinguished composer of the day, the man of the hour. Look upon your writing-table there, and see the invitations which have come to you from well-known people who want to lionise you, the applications for interviews, and for autographs. Do not they convince you that you ought not to drift back to the old life of the Quartier? No, babbo; you shall never go there. The influence of your companions there would be fatal.'

'In other words,' he laughed, 'you mean that I should just drink myself to death?'

'When you don't drink you know you're much better in both health and temper,' she said, with a convincing air.

But he laughed lightly, stroking her dark hair as she lifted her handsome anxious face to his.

'I must be going,' he said. 'I have an appointment at Covent Garden Theatre at three, so I've only just time. You'll wait and see your lover, of course. Rosmead's a good fellow, a very good fellow. I always liked him. He's become quite a famous romance-writer, I hear.'

'Yes,' Fosca replied. 'Even the Paris papers speak of him as one of the most prominent among English novelists.'

But why do you refer to him as my lover, babbo?' she inquired, laughing a trifle nervously.

'Because he was so long ago, and, judging from your lover-like attitude at St. Barbe's last night, I assume that the old love has been revived,' answered the Marquis, a mischievous twinkle in his dark, deep-set eyes.

Fosca blushed, but did not answer. The old Bohemian knew by her demeanour that he spoke the truth.

'Well, don't marry too quickly, that's all,' her father urged. 'You know how lonely I shall be without you, especially nowadays, when I have to put on a clean starched shirt every night, and dress like a café-waiter.'

His daughter laughed. One of his pet aversions was evening dress. He always declared that he bore a striking resemblance to Monsieur de Paris, the official French headsman, and she often declared to her friends that her father would be entirely satisfied with his success were it not for the fact that he had now to conform to the conventional rules of society. He could no longer drink that cheap wine of the Quartier he loved so well, nor could he consume those long rank cigars. For good Havanas he had no appreciation. Like many another Bohemian, whom Dame Success has dragged out of the Latin Quartier, he retained a secret affection for those thin and particularly choking cigars which one purchases for ten centimes at the corner of the Rue Madame. He was at home beyond the Pont Neuf, where he could lounge in the little cafés or eat at Mother Géry's, and chat with the men he knew; but here, in London society, the admired composer of one of the most notable operas of the past ten years, he felt uncomfortable, and even hated his success because of the social duties it imposed upon him.

To Fosca, however, the gaiety was pleasant. Long ago, when serving those grand ladies at the Louvre, she had

often wished that she, too, might be rich, receive invitations to balls and dinners, and wear dresses which other women would admire and envy. In her day-dreams she had sometimes imagined herself in the place of one of those women whose accepted invitations were so numerous that they had to keep a diary of them, and now she was actually one of them. For more than a year her life with her father had been one perpetual round of gaiety in Vienna, in Petersburg, in Milan, in Berlin, in Rome, and now in London. Courted and flattered because of her extreme beauty, she had drained the cup of pleasure to the dregs, but inwardly she told herself that not one man she had met had ever stirred within her heart the chord of love. In her memory there had ever remained the image of the one man for whom she entertained affection — the dark-haired, grave-faced, unsuccessful artist, the man whom she had so deeply wronged. But at such times there would arise within her a remembrance, a strange, terrible ghost of the past which held her transfixed, dumb, horror-stricken.

It was in this mood that she sat when a few moments later the Marquis had left, having struggled into his coat, and lit one of his favourite ten-centime cigars, which he found he could purchase at a shop in Coventry Street, Haymarket. She presented a somewhat nervous appearance as she crouched again beside the fire, her tiny red morocco shoes upon the fender. Her dress of pearl-grey, which any woman would have recognised as bearing the unmistakable stamp of the Rue de la Paix, rendered her figure more slim and fragile than her black costume of the previous night, but it suited her complexion well, even though her face was a trifle pale and anxious. She had glanced at the little travelling-clock on the mantelshelf, and had seen that it was already past three, when almost the next second the man she was expecting was ushered in.

She rose slowly to meet him, and he took her hand without a word. Then, when they had both seated themselves and the door had closed, she exclaimed, in French :

‘So you have come ! I began to think you did not intend to see me again.’

‘For both our sakes, Fosca, it would have been best, perhaps, if I had not come,’ he answered in a low intense tone, his voice shaken by an emotion he tried in vain to subdue.

‘Why?’ she inquired quickly, in some surprise. ‘You made an appointment. If you had not kept it, your conduct would not have been gentlemanly.’

‘I know it,’ he said. ‘But there are times when even rudeness is judicious.’

She sighed, guessing at what he hinted.

‘I have learnt,’ he went on, ‘I have learnt of your father’s wonderful success, and of your recent travels all over Europe. The Marquis is certainly to be congratulated, and you, too, on possessing such a talented father. I saw the “Parpaglione” the other night, but never dreamed that he, my old friend, the father of the woman I loved, composed that delightful music.’

‘The woman you loved,’ she repeated in a low voice, sad and mournful, staring into the fire. ‘You use the past tense. Then you no longer love me?’

He hesitated, gazing at her white, haggard face, and seeing there how soul-weary she was.

‘I did not say that,’ he hastened to assure her. ‘Any declaration of affection is, however, futile under the circumstances.’

‘Why?’

‘Because you refuse to be frank with me,’ he answered.

‘Ah!’ she gasped, holding her breath for a single instant. ‘Ah, yes ! I, of course, told you last night.’

‘You told me nothing,’ he observed. ‘It is to ask you to confide in me the truth that I have come to you now.’

‘I have told you the truth,’ she answered, composing herself in determination.

‘You say that the cause of your leaving Paris was not love for Jean. Well, what was it?’ he demanded. ‘Surely, Fosca, I, of all men, have a right to an explanation?’

‘Yes,’ she slowly answered. ‘You have a right, the greatest right, but unfortunately my motive for leaving Paris on that day was a secret, and must still ever remain a secret.’

‘One that inculpates you?’

‘Inculpates me!’ she gasped, blanching to the lips in an instant. ‘What do you mean?’

Was it possible, she wondered, that he could have any suspicion of the terrible truth concealed within her heart?

‘I mean that you wrote to me, saying that you preferred Jean. What guarantee have I that such was not actually the case?’

She breathed again more freely. Evidently he knew nothing.

‘You have only my word, Bertram,’ she answered quietly, looking him straight in the face, with her bright, dark eyes brimming with tears. ‘The word of an honest woman.’

At that instant Rosmead felt himself wavering. Was it true, after all, that his doubts were without foundation; that she really loved him with that true womanly love for which his heart had yearned so long. He remembered Lena, the degenerated product of the theatre dressing-room, the idle, intemperate woman who had done her best to bring him down to her own level, who had forced him to drink with her in those low bars he abominated; the

woman who would journey half London over if she thought whiskey would be offered her; the woman who would pawn the rings he had given her, buy gin with the proceeds, and drink it neat until their rooms stank with its stale, nauseating odour.

Often and often had a lump arisen in his throat, and bitter tears welled in his deep, serious eyes when, after trying to argue with her, and show her the folly of her actions, she had raved at him, abusing and cursing him. Many and many a night had he gone out, crushed and hopeless, wandering down one or other of the quieter streets off the Strand to the Embankment, plunged in his own sad thoughts, with his future dismal and hopeless. Everywhere, in the eyes of all his friends, Lena had disgraced him. He never now took her anywhere, because of her terrible craving for drink. He had grown callous, and ceased to regard her with affection. She had by her constant ill-temper, her utter disregard for his well-being, her disgraceful behaviour, and her ever-ready abuse, dulled his senses and stifled all the love that ever existed within his heart.

Now, at this moment, with Fosca at his side, he could only regard the woman who bore his name as an encumbrance.

He remembered O'Donovan's advice, and resolved to stand firm and seek an explanation.

'I should never have doubted your honesty, Fosca,' he said, after a long pause, 'were it not for that letter.'

'It was a mistake which I've ever since regretted,' she answered quickly, adding, 'Then you don't think I'm honest?'

'I cannot judge until I know the true facts,' he responded diplomatically. 'At present you are only seeking to mystify me.'

‘No, no,’ she protested vehemently. ‘Believe me, Bertram, I would tell you all — explain everything — if I only dared. But I dare not. It would be fatal.’

‘Because you think that the truth would reflect upon you too strongly?’

‘Ah!’ she sighed deeply, in a trembling voice. ‘If I could tell you, even then you would never believe the strange facts without proof — and proof I could not give you. Silence is best, even though it be enforced.’

‘A silence that will drive me to desperation.’

‘No, no,’ she answered. ‘Believe that I am still an honest woman, that I do not lie to you, that — that I love you.’

He looked at her long and earnestly. In exercising his profession as novelist, he had learned to observe closely, to analyse character, and to divine thoughts. He saw in her eyes that bright, eager, wistful look which cannot be feigned — the glance of genuine love. He was inclined to believe her, yet, sitting there in her chair, her head thrown back, her red lips parted, displaying her even rows of pearly teeth, her dark hair straying in tiny tendrils across her white brow, she seemed to him so typical of Circe that he hesitated.

Was her declaration of love mere caprice, he wondered. Was it not likely that in the years that had passed she had had a troop of lovers? The great beauty she had developed was sufficient guarantee that many men had admired her, and what more natural than she should have reciprocated their love? She had come to England to participate in her father’s success, and now, finding in her old student-lover a man of mark, she had resolved to again bring him to her side, and to toy with his affections as she had done in those days of long ago. Such thoughts flashed through his brain as he sat before her, and his heart hardened.

Witnessing the heavy look upon his face, she slowly stretched forth her white, bejewelled hand, but he did not offer to take it.

‘Do you believe no word I utter?’ she asked in a low, intense tone.

‘I cannot feel convinced that you still love me,’ he answered. ‘If you did, you would at least confide in me.’

‘I do confide in you,’ she protested. ‘My inability to explain the reason why I left Paris on that morning, long ago, is not my own fault. I act under compulsion.’

‘You fear an exposure of the truth,’ he observed in a half whisper.

‘Yes,’ she sighed. ‘At present the truth must remain hidden from everyone, even from you, the man I love. If I told you it would be fatal to your interests — as well as to mine.’

‘I really don’t understand you, Fosca,’ he said, growing for a moment impatient. ‘You seem determined to mystify me without any just reason.’

‘No,’ she answered. ‘You mystify yourself by continuing to repeat the one question to which I am unable to give a satisfactory reply.’

‘Why?’

‘Because I do not myself know the actual truth of the circumstances which forced me to leave Paris, therefore I cannot explain to you that which is still a mystery,’ she replied with an affected calmness. Her face had grown hard-set and very pale, as if she were struggling desperately to preserve the great secret of her life, one which ever oppressed her, holding her crushed and powerless.

On his part, he was hesitating whether he should tell her of his marriage, or whether it would be best to leave her without referring to the unfortunate bond which held him galled, and aloof from her. Her determination to preserve

her secret — which he felt confident was a guilty one — made it impossible to believe in her declaration of constant affection. Once he thought he had detected an artificial ring in her voice, and by this his suspicions became deep-rooted. His nature was by no means impetuous. His careful studies of character and human nature had rendered him a little cold and cynical, a trifle world-weary before his time, as it ever does with men who practise the profession of letters. The novelist's success depends mainly upon his keen insight into character and his quick perception of all the emotions and passions that stir the human heart, powers which he only achieves after long and constant studies, studies which in the majority of cases render him coldly philosophical, with a disbelief in any unselfishness in human nature, morose perhaps, and generally wearied, and apathetic of the world's pleasures. Bertram Rosmead was, however, not naturally a morose man. Constantly depressed by Lena's ill-temper and intemperance, he had, nevertheless, become dull, and careless of all beyond the manuscript which at the moment lay upon his writing-table.

Should he confide in Fosca? Should he tell her of his unfortunate union with a woman he had never, and could never, love?

He paused.

She had not been frank with him; therefore, he would not be frank with her. No. He determined to part from her, and allow her to remain in ignorance. When she discovered the truth, she would be filled with chagrin. That should be her punishment.

‘I think,’ he said at last, regarding her with a calm, open look, ‘I think it was rather unfortunate for us both that we should have met again like this, Fosca. It has only opened up old wounds, which I thought were healed long ago.’

‘Are you sorry?’ she asked, in a low, reproachful whis-

per. 'Do you actually regret, Bertram? Yet you used to declare that you would love me my whole life through, you used to assure me, when we walked together in the Bois — do you remember those days? — how well you loved me, how that I was your heart, body, and soul? And now all is of the past. You regret because we have met,' she added, sighing, with poignant bitterness.

'We were both young and foolish then,' he stammered. 'Age and experience changes everyone.'

'Then if it has changed you,' she said, in a voice half choked with emotion, 'if you no longer love me, there is little use for us to meet again. When you reflect, are you not convinced that I, too, loved you truly then; are you not convinced that I cared for no one except yourself?'

'Yes,' he responded promptly. 'You loved me once, Fosca — until you knew that I was penniless.'

'Ah, no!' she cried, bursting into tears, as, rising suddenly, and standing at his side, she grasped his hand. 'I swear it was not so. Money had nothing whatever to do with it.'

'But love had,' he interrupted ruthlessly. 'You loved Jean Potin.'

'Never,' she declared. 'I swear I never did, any more than you loved the — that woman whom your friend O'Donovan adored.'

He noticed with what strange hesitancy she spoke of the mysterious Violette, and wondered. It seemed as though, for some unknown reason, she hated the dead woman's memory.

'But from motives which you are, even now, resolved to hide, you led me to believe so,' he observed, without attempting to disguise the doubt consuming him.

She sighed, then held her breath, regarding him with a troubled, wistful expression.

‘I know, I know,’ she murmured. ‘But you will forgive my one foolish action? I desired to leave behind me all of the past, even you, because — because I was unworthy your love,’ she cried, in tears.

‘Your words are sufficient proof of your unfaithfulness,’ he answered, in a chilling tone.

‘My unfaithfulness!’ she echoed blankly. ‘Ah! If I could tell you — if I dared to tell you — all! But you will never believe me — never.’

‘No,’ he said, rising slowly, and putting her outstretched hand from him. ‘You speak the truth, Fosca. I cannot believe you.’

‘You believe that I lie to you,’ she gasped, drawing back, and regarding him through her tears.

‘I express no opinion,’ he answered coldly; ‘none beyond the suggestion that we should not meet again.’

‘You will forsake me because — because of this,’ she wailed, in a trembling voice.

‘When you care to give me a clear explanation, I am ready to hear it,’ he replied. ‘Until then, we shall not meet.’

He stretched forth his hand, and hers lingered in it for a moment. Then he released her, and, turning, left the room without further word; while she, when the door had closed, flung herself upon the couch, and, heedless of everything, gave way to a torrent of bitter tears. The man she loved better than life, the man who had been ever in her thoughts since that well-remembered day when she had fled secretly from Paris, had forsaken her, because he believed her worthless, soulless.

Yet her secret held her dumb.

CHAPTER XVIII

THAT WOMAN'S LOVER'

Two hours later, while the yellow London twilight was fast darkening, Fosca sat in the low chair, her red, tear-stained eyes fixed blankly upon the flickering fire, reflecting bitterly upon the interview with Bertram, and its result. The Marquis had not yet returned, and she had not rung for the lights, preferring to remain in the glimmer of the fading day, as it harmonised better with her own sad thoughts.

Bertram had discarded her. He had forsaken her because of her inability to speak the truth, and she was now trying to devise some excuse by which she might bring him again to her side. She had staked all — her heart, her soul, her honour — and she had lost. He doubted her. He had implied that she lied to him, and had coldly told her that further belief in her honesty was impossible. She had, therefore, no hope of regaining his love, because she knew too well, alas! that any explanation was out of the question. Her lips were sealed in a fatal silence.

She murmured some strange, incoherent words, sighed deeply, and then remained with her pointed chin resting in her palm, her eyes fixed again upon the fire.

In this reflective attitude she sat for some time without stirring, when suddenly she was awakened from her painful reverie by the door opening, and the waiter exclaiming in French —

‘There is a gentleman to see mademoiselle.’

‘Who?’ asked Fosca, turning quickly.

‘Monsieur has given no name,’ the man answered. ‘Will mademoiselle see him?’

Fosca, now thoroughly aroused, reflected for a moment. It was strange that a man who wished to see her should refuse his name. It savoured of mystery. Her first impulse was to decline to see the stranger, but on second thought that it might be someone who desired to see her father on business, she, after a moment’s further hesitation, told the waiter to admit him.

The door closed, but opened again quickly as the mysterious caller was ushered into the sitting-room, where the only light was from the flickering flames, and where Fosca was still sitting in a calm, unruffled attitude. He was stout of figure, florid of complexion, and breathed heavily, as if the ascent of the stairs had been too much for him. Unable to see him distinctly, she leaned forward, regarding him with some surprise.

The light of a leaping flame suddenly fell full upon his face, revealing his features, and as she next instant recognised them, she uttered a startled cry of dismay, then sat glaring at him. The waiter had left, and they were alone together.

‘Ah!’ he exclaimed, in French, in a low, meaning tone, as, uninvited, he walked across and took a vacant chair near her — the one in which Bertram had sat. ‘I see you have not forgotten.’

‘How could I ever forget?’ she gasped, pale and trembling.

‘No,’ he answered, in a coarse, hoarse voice. ‘I suppose the recollection isn’t very pleasant.’ He spoke French almost perfectly, yet his slight accent pronounced him an Englishman.

Again the furtive flame shot up and illuminated the

coarse, florid face with its grey side-whiskers. The features revealed were those of the shambling recluse of Staple Inn, Sir Douglas Vizard, the man whose name was on the list of patrons of many benevolent societies and religious institutions, and who so often spoke at young men’s meetings at Exeter Hall.

‘And you have sought me out to taunt me again, to drive me to desperation — perhaps to suicide!’ she cried bitterly, glaring at him, her tiny hands clenched, her rings sparkling in the firelight.

‘I have no desire that you should make such a fool of yourself, my dear,’ he answered with imperturbable coolness, sitting back, with his crossed legs stretched towards the fire. ‘Of course I’m well aware that my presence isn’t very welcome,’ he added with mock politeness. ‘I really couldn’t allow you to come to London without paying you a visit. I wrote asking you to call on me, but as you refused, I have come to you.’

She lifted her eyes to his with a look of ineffable hatred.

‘Are you so brutal, so devoid of all human sympathy, that you take a delight in thus torturing me?’ she cried fiercely. ‘Have you forgotten the last occasion when we met?’

‘No; I have cause to remember it,’ he answered, with a sarcastic laugh. ‘Just at the moment you thought yourself safest I turned up at your hotel in Vienna, like a skeleton at the feast — eh?’ And he smiled inwardly as he saw the impression his ruthless words produced upon her. ‘Surely you have by this time learnt that it is impossible to rid yourself of me,’ he added; ‘therefore why make attempts which must always result in your chagrin?’

‘Hear me!’ she cried in a hard, stern voice, rising, and standing erect in defiance before him. ‘I will rid myself of you who haunt me thus like some gaunt shadow. There is a limit to human suffering, and you have driven me very

near to it. In these years that have passed you alone have held me fettered within your thrall; you alone have rendered me nervous and wretched; you alone have tortured me until I have a hundred times been upon the verge of suicide. In Paris, when I had no money, I was unworthy your attention; but these last two years, ever since we met by chance in the Montagne de la Cour in Brussels, you have haunted me — in Berlin, in Rome, in Vienna, in Paris, and now in London. I hate you!’

‘And yet I am mademoiselle’s best friend!’ he observed in a half-reproachful tone.

‘No,’ she answered; ‘my worst enemy. At intervals you seek me, recall all the horrible past, and profit by my misfortune.’

‘Have I not saved you from exposure, disgrace, and even something more terrible? Is it not to me alone that you owe everything?’

‘But will you never forget?’ she cried despairingly. ‘Will you never allow me a respite of peace and happiness, or must I hope only to escape you by self-destruction? Believe me, I do not fear death, tortured as I ever am by these haunting remembrances, these hideous ghosts of the past.’

She was standing before him, an erect, elegant figure, her face pale and determined, an air of tragedy in her attitude.

‘My dear girl,’ he replied, with a brutal laugh, ‘your life is entirely in your own hands, and it really matters nothing to me. If you prefer to kill yourself you only acknowledge your own cowardice by so doing.’

‘No,’ she retorted, ‘you, yourself, are the coward to treat a woman with such cold cruelty. Once you thought the knowledge you hold gave you power over me, but you were mistaken. I defied you,’ she said, vehemently. ‘I still defy you!’

'Yes, yes,' he laughed. 'I've heard all that fine talk from your pretty lips before. Defiance, however, is a word you shall expunge from your vocabulary. Only those who are pure and honest can afford to use that expression.'

'And I am not?' she cried, her bright eyes flashing in anger. 'You deliberately seek me out to insult me!'

'I have said nothing, my dear, to reflect upon your good name,' he answered, a trifle more politely, fearing lest, losing control over herself, she might create a scene. He was not prepared for that, because his name and reputation were too well known in London.

'Then why have you come here?' she demanded.

'Why did I seek you last time, in Vienna?'

'To blackmail me,' she answered boldly.

He bowed, as though she had paid him the most delicate of compliments. The great brassy rings on his coarse hands shone brightly in the fitful light, and from the heavy albert across his broad waistcoat Fosca's eyes caught the glint of gold.

'You are determined to grow fat upon my misfortune,' she observed hoarsely. 'When I was a mere shopgirl in the Louvre, you only troubled me with your attentions, bringing me flowers and sweetmeats during business hours, and getting me into trouble with the head saleswoman. But now, when you know that I can obtain money from my father, you are determined to have the full price of my secret.'

'I gave you the choice of an alternative,' he observed abruptly.

'One that was an insult to my honour,' she cried, in a voice of withering contempt. 'One that no honest woman could accept!'

'Honest woman!' he echoed, for the first time betraying signs of impatience. 'Go to the mirror, light the gas,

and see whether your face is that of an honest woman,' he said, in a tone of mingled anger and disgust.

'And you!' she retorted, with a gesture of antipathy. 'That you, the bearer of one of the oldest and most honoured names in England, should descend to gain a woman's love by the despicable means to which you have resorted, can only fill one with utter scorn and loathing.'

'Are such recriminations of any use?' he asked. 'Why exhaust the dictionary in this manner? Surely your own actions have been far worse than mine. Rather let us transact our — shall we call it business? — and end this interview.'

She paused, motionless, statuesque. Unable to stir a muscle, she knew that she was powerless in this man's hands — that a word from him and an exposure would be brought about, an exposure before facing which she would rather kill herself. Her life was irrevocably in the hands of this coarse, brutal man who delighted in torturing her with hideous remembrances, as a mode of holding her cowed and terrified.

'If I thought we would never meet again, I would willingly pay you any price you ask,' she said, in a monotonous voice, as if speaking to herself.

'No,' he replied, with that feigned politeness which aggravated her. 'I would not wish to put mademoiselle to inconvenience for any large amount. In fact, I prefer small sums. They are much more acceptable just at this period, when things in the City are not over-bright.'

She made a gesture of impatience.

'Then you are resolved to taunt me, always?' she cried. 'Shall I never escape your abominable attentions?'

'I do not intend that you should, my dear,' he answered coolly. 'Once you defied me. I do not think you will do so again.'

'You believed me a woman without love, without honour,' she answered. 'You believed that, to safeguard my secret, I would throw in my lot with you — you thought that for you I would discard the man I loved.'

'Loved! Bah!' he cried. 'And that man to whom you were so devoted — how has he treated you? He has cast you aside and married.'

'Married!' she gasped, starting back, the light dying from her face. 'Bertram Rosmead married! It's a lie!'

'No,' he replied, 'it's the truth. His wife is a rather gay little woman, who used to be at the Adelphi. She comes to visit me sometimes, for we're quite old friends. I knew her years before she became his wife.'

'And are they happy?' Fosca inquired hoarsely, in a voice which showed that his announcement had crushed from her all hope, all desire for life.

'Happy? No,' he laughed. 'Why, she hates and detests the very sight of him. Whenever they have a row she comes round to me and tells me all about it. I'm sorry for her, poor little woman.'

Fosca was silent for a moment, then, fixing her dark eyes upon his red, bloated face, she drew a long breath, and said:

'Sorrow, or sympathy, from your lips is unnecessary. If, as you tell me, Bertram has married, then you are his wife's lover!'

He laughed again — a light, self-satisfied laugh.

'Well, and then?'

'In England you have a court for divorce,' she answered, very calmly, her eyes fixed upon him.

In an instant, Vizard recognised that his boast had placed in her hands a weapon wherewith to combat his attacks. His thick, red lips compressed tightly. His ready tongue had wrecked his chances once more, as they

had done times without number. Inwardly he declared himself a fool, but outwardly he betrayed no sign of uneasiness. For twenty years this impecunious, but philanthropic, baronet had led an adventurer's life, and his wits had been sharpened by the constant exercise of caution and stratagem, necessary for the derivation of a sourceless income.

‘I think Rosmead made a bad bargain when he married her. She was just the skittiest little girl that ever trod the stage, while he's, from what she says, a dull, heavy-browed boor, who thinks of nothing but his books and his writing.’

The woman before him took no heed of his words. She was only reflecting upon the fact which he had just divulged, the fact that the man she loved, the man to whom, that very afternoon, she had declared her passion, was already bound to a woman who was worthless. She remembered Bertram's hesitation; she recollected how pained he had appeared when she spoke of love, and that he had not once attempted to kiss her, or display any affection.

No doubt existed in her mind that he was true to this woman he had married; this woman who was the mistress of the mean, despicable hypocrite now before her. Her loathing of Vizard was increased by this knowledge. She hated him with increased hatred, because he had so cruelly deceived the man she loved.

‘Is this the actual truth?’ she asked, regarding him with earnest, unwavering glance.

‘Certainly,’ he answered. ‘Your lover, the man you preferred to me, is the husband of Lena Loder, once walking-lady at the Adelphi.’

‘And you are that woman's lover,’ she cried. ‘You, with this wretched woman's aid, have deceived Bertram,

as you have deceived me! It is sufficient, now that I know the truth. Go, leave me!' she added, with imperious gesture and heaving breast. 'Leave me, and recollect that we do not meet again.'

'Mademoiselle overlooks the object of my visit,' he said, bowing.

'I overlook nothing. Not a single sou shall you have from me henceforth,' she answered determinedly.

'You prefer exposure and ruin,' he said, his manner changing in an instant.

'My future is my own affair,' she retorted, and, with a quick *frou-frou* of her flounces, abruptly left the room.

For a few moments he sat alone in the semi-darkness, for the fire had died down, and no longer shed its fitful light. His face was blanched by anger. Then, suddenly, with a fierce imprecation on his lips, he rose, and strode out and down the stairs, into the street.

'By heaven! woman, you've tricked me,' he muttered, 'but the price of your defiance is greater than you imagine, more terrible than you've ever dreamed. You have chosen to do this. Well, so let it be.'

CHAPTER XIX

AMONG THE 'VAGABONDS'

SPRING came, and with it the London season and the May meetings. On the *Evening Telegraph* the fair-bearded gentleman, whose grievance amounted to a chronic disease, was told off to report those Dissenting assemblies, and during the weeks they lasted the number of free breakfasts and free luncheons he consumed resulted in the usual bilious attack, which incapacitated him for a week afterwards. But the office did not begrudge him the week's holiday after three weeks of constant prayer-meetings, and the rather doleful deliberations of those ecclesiastics who 'come with the Merry May,' and sun themselves in the busy Strand.

Bertram Rosmead worked on in his dismal den, with the constant click of the telegraph ever in his ear, a life full of surprises, as far as news was concerned, for only those who live at the end of a telegraph wire know how every moment brings some fresh sensation for which the British public are ready to pay their nimble pennies; how every fresh whirr of the 'tape' is indicative of some event of importance, from the premium on gold at Buenos Ayres, and the usual weekly revolution in Guatemala, to the latest complication of European politics created by Lord Salisbury's last sneeze. In this little world of whirl and bustle, of noise and turmoil, Rosmead shrunk within himself, worn and weary, hopeless and despairing. He sat in his chair performing his duties

mechanically, only giving vent, perhaps, to some remark tempered by a biting sarcasm. He had grown cold, inert, austere, and quite unlike his usual buoyant self, for he dreamed always of Fosca, yet with a knowledge that he was debarred from loving her. She had left London with the Marquis, and he knew not whither they had gone. With the sun of his life blotted out, he held the world in contempt, and had now no pleasure beyond that derived from the writing of his novels in his own dreary room in that dismal court, called by courtesy an Inn. For recreation and fresh air he would sometimes spend an idle hour in that narrow thoroughfare of second-hand booksellers, Holywell Street, a thoroughfare which maintains throughout the year an odour of orange-peel, and where literary rubbish, the sweepings of publishers' warehouses and dead men's libraries, is shot. After his toilsome duties at the newspaper office, he went home daily, eager to get once more to the work he loved, the writing of fiction, a work which was to him a pleasure. Yet, even with the reputation he had obtained and the several books which were selling well, the profits were absurdly small, a fact at which Lena was always grumbling.

One bright day in June, however, he received a note from his agent, Mr. Howden, and in response, called and saw his son. The latter, whose courtesy to all literary men is well known, and to whose keen far-sightedness many a novelist is considerably indebted, received him, and made a very pleasing announcement, namely, that he had been approached by a great syndicate, the best known in literary circles, and one which supplied fiction to half the newspapers in the world, with a view to obtaining some serial stories by him.

'Do they really want me to write novels regularly for their syndicate?' Rosmead asked, surprised.

‘Certainly. From their letter it appears that they would want two full novels a year for three years, and three or four short stories each year,’ answered young Mr. Howden, glancing at the letter before him. ‘Do you feel inclined to do them? Of course, we should ask reasonable terms. They have many clients, and are therefore able to pay well for serial rights. Besides, we must also bear in mind that such publication of your stories in America and the Colonies gives you world-wide advertisement, which will help to dispose of your American and Colonial editions.’

‘I’m quite ready to sign contracts,’ Rosmead said eagerly. ‘As I told you the other day, I am exceedingly anxious to give up journalism.’

‘Well, here is, I think, an excellent opportunity,’ Mr. Howden said. ‘The terms I shall ask would certainly secure you a moderate income for the next three years.’

‘Then I leave it entirely in your hands,’ Bertram said, overjoyed at thought of leaving London and settling somewhere in the quiet country, where he could write undisturbed in the rural peace he loved so well. The pleasures of town life had long ago ceased to attract him. He had yearned for a quiet existence in a pretty cottage in the country, away from the sick hurry of the Press, where he could think and write. He was essentially a dreamer, yet practical withal, a man who took infinite pains with everything, although to his fellows he was regarded as careless and slap-dash on account of his innate Bohemianism.

‘You wish me to write and suggest terms?’ asked Mr. Howden, junior.

‘Please do,’ he replied. ‘Then when I have signed the contracts I shall leave London and be able to do some really good work.’

'We have every hope that you will progress rapidly,' said his agent. 'You may rely that my father and myself will do our utmost in your interests. In the course of a few days I will let you know how the negotiations have progressed, and put their proposals before you for consideration.'

For a quarter of an hour longer they chatted, young Mr. Howden suggesting that his client should write a few magazine stories, and giving him some very good advice, then they parted, then Bertram went back to Dane's Inn highly gratified, first because the great syndicate should have singled him out as a coming man, and, secondly, because by writing these novels to run week by week in the newspapers he would be free to leave journalism, and realise the dream of his life; he would be able to live independently in the country, and devote his whole time to fiction.

Lena, in a soiled pink wrapper, her hair undressed, although it was one o'clock, and her slippers down at heel, was cooking a chop when he entered. A tumbler of whiskey and water stood on the table, and the room retained a stale odour of spirits emitted from a dirty glass on the mantelshelf. Her eyes were bright, her face slightly flushed, and the twitching of her mouth and eyebrows were sufficient signs that she had been drinking already that morning. When he related to her what young Mr. Howden had said, she turned quickly, asking —

'Then you intend to give up the *Evening Telegraph*?'

'Certainly. I shall leave as soon as possible after signing the contracts.'

'Why not keep on both?' she suggested. 'The paper is a certainty, and you know how very uncertain novels are.'

‘No, Lena,’ he answered. ‘I cannot do both well. I’m content to live economically in the country and work, and I’m sure you won’t deny me this chance of success.’

‘You won’t get me to live in the country. I had enough of it at Hounslow. You like dead-alive holes; I don’t,’ she answered in sudden anger. ‘If you like to leave London, do; but I shall stay here.’

‘I intend to live in the country,’ he replied quite calmly; adding, ‘Reflect, Lena, and you will see that it is to our mutual advantage that I should do so. We could come to town sometimes, you know. Surely summer in the bright, open country, with fresh air and flowers, is better than this dark, grimy old Inn, dismal even on the brightest day. The country is healthier, too, for both of us.’

‘I hate it. I’m London born, and am always better in London than anywhere else,’ she replied petulantly.

‘And you wish to keep me here,’ he said impatiently. ‘You would even wreck my life more than it has already been wrecked?’

‘Oh, give up your work, if you like, and go and bury yourself in the country,’ she answered. ‘I suppose you’ve grown lazy, if the real truth were known. All this flattery has made you unbearably vain.’

‘I don’t think I’m vain,’ he answered. ‘Praise in the Press and personal paragraphs are the food on which a reputation is fed.’

‘Well, go and live in the country, and you’ll soon find that everybody will forget you. But if you go, you’ll go by yourself. I shan’t.’

He did not reply. Strange, he thought, that she should prefer London to a pretty country cottage. Strange that she should prefer to clean her own rooms and cook her own meals to employing a servant. But of late, since she had

developed the alcoholic habit, she had ceased to care for her home, for her personal appearance, for anything. During the whole of the past year she had never, on one occasion, sewn on a button or mended anything. His own buttons he sewed himself, as he had done in his bachelor days. When she was not cooking and washing up dishes, she slept. She never read a book, and hated needlework. He knew it was useless to argue with her; for in her highly nervous state she would only fly into a passion, and pour forth upon him a torrent of abuse.

That night he went to the usual monthly dinner of the Vagabond Club, a society formed among literary men and artists for the purpose of dining together once a month at the Holborn Restaurant. The dinners were always enjoyable, attended as they are by the most prominent *notabilités littéraires*, the guest of the evening being one of the men of the hour, a great painter, a great explorer, a great soldier, and a great writer. In the early days of the formation of the Club by Marston, Hall Caine, and a few others, it was an honour to be elected, and Rosmead, as one of the original members, was always constant in his attendance, usually sitting with his friend, the editor of the literary journal to which he contributed reviews; Teddy O'Donovan, the painter; and George Grainger, the well-known writer whose line of romance was very similar to his own. Sometimes his publisher, a happy, jovial man, would join them, and after much gossip and 'shop,' the discussion of new books and pictures, wherein criticism was often more pointed than polite, the little party would adjourn with Rosmead down to the Lyric Club, where a further pleasant hour would be spent over whiskey and cigars.

These evenings were pleasant breaks to Bertram's otherwise monotonous existence, for they had a smack of the Bohemianism of the past in them, and all the men he met

were on equal footing, as men should ever be in Bohemia. There were, of course, one or two of those egotistical ones dubbed 'bounders,' men whose self-esteem was greater than the excellence of their work; but they were classed as outsiders, and only regarded as peculiar specimens of the literary genus. Not only was the function one of pleasure, but often a considerable amount of business was transacted between editors and authors across that board, and more than once Rosmead had found that introductions at this informal feast were of the greatest use afterwards. Usually about three hundred 'Vagabonds' and their friends sat down, a gathering which was unique, comprising as it did half the literary talent of England. Over dinner the gossip was always merry, and the criticisms caustic; but afterwards a popular entertainer would entertain his brother 'Vagabonds,' a prima-donna would sing a song or two, or that talented black-and-white artist of 'Punch,' Mr. March, would depict upon huge sheets of paper caricatures of some London types.

This evening was a particularly good one. The room was crowded, the guest was one of the most brilliant of our younger humorists, whose speech was uproariously funny, and the men about Rosmead were all men he knew intimately, a happy, laughing crowd of writers, painters, and critics.

He had already confided in his friend and editor his domestic infelicity, and now told him of his intention of leaving London. The editor was a calm, philosophical, but extremely sympathetic man. He numbered Rosmead among his small circle of most intimate friends, and had for a long while been pained by the knowledge of Lena's intemperance.

'It's the best thing you can do, my dear boy,' his friend said. 'If you go away from London, down to some quiet

country village, she won't be able to get drink, and may perhaps be weaned from it.'

'Then you advise me to give up journalism?'

'By all means, under the circumstances,' his editor replied. 'Your contracts will keep you going, and it's really impossible to combine fiction with daily journalism. How you've done it for so long I can't think.'

'Sometimes I'm surprised myself,' Rosmead replied. 'By a bit of perseverance, I suppose.'

'A bit!' the editor cried. 'You've got more than your fair share, I think. I only wish I had the patience and steady plodding methods that you have.'

But Bertram laughed lightly, and declared that he had had but one object in view, namely to obtain a name as a novelist, and to that end had boldly faced misfortune, and gradually managed to surmount every difficulty.

'You deserve every success, my dear Rosmead,' exclaimed the elder man, gravely; 'you'll reap the reward of all your trials and troubles some day.'

'I hope so,' observed the younger man, with a sigh, and lowering his voice he added, 'God knows I've had enough this last year or so.'

The editor nodded. He knew well the wretched story, and was grieved that his friend should be situated thus.

Meanwhile, Lena, having assured her husband that she was going to spend the evening with her mother in Gough Square, and asked him to call for her at eleven to take her home, dressed and went round to Staple Inn instead.

'Well, how are you to-night, old boy?' she asked the wheezy, shuffling baronet as he opened the door and admitted her to his stuffy, shabby chambers. 'I thought I'd look round and see that you're still alive. My beauty's gone out to the "Vagabonds."''

'And to-night you're a Vagabondess — eh?' laughed

Vizard, setting down the lamp and drawing forward one of his rickety armchairs.

‘Yes, I’m thirsty,’ she said, disregarding his invitation to be seated; but drawing off her gloves she went to the side-board and took out a bottle of gin.

‘Shall I get some water?’ asked the baronet.

‘Water? No, fool!’ she answered. ‘You know I never spoil good spirits. Water’s apt to get on your brain, you know,’ and she laughed an idiotic laugh, for she had been drinking all day, and was muddled.

She poured out some in a wine-glass, and drank it off at one gulp, then taking off her hat and tossing it upon the couch, flung herself into the armchair and commenced to chaff him.

‘I shan’t be able to come and look you up much longer,’ she said at last, leaning her arm on the table, whereon there lay some Gospel tracts and leaflets of the Church of England Temperance Society. He sat back heavily in his chair, looking at her.

‘Why, my dear?’ he asked in surprise.

‘Because we’re going to move into the country. He’s decided at last, and won’t hear a word to the contrary.’

‘Well, you needn’t go far from town, and you can make excuses to come up often. Surely that’s easy enough. He lets you have your own way entirely.’

‘He has to. If he don’t, he don’t have much peace, I can tell you,’ she laughed.

He smiled broadly, displaying a very bad set of teeth discoloured by smoking.

‘I know you’re a capricious little person,’ he said. ‘It’s a good job you’ve got such an easy-going husband, or you wouldn’t be able to enjoy yourself as you do. Nine men out of ten would have suspected you long ago.’

‘Suspect!’ she cried, her eyes shifty on account of her

inebriety. 'I don't care what he suspects. If he likes to be a hermit, I don't intend to live like a nun.'

'There's certainly nothing nun-like about you, my dear,' he answered, laughing. 'But if I were you I'd humour him a bit. Remember, if he left you, you'd be pretty hard up.'

'Left me!' she echoed. 'If he did I'd want half the money he gets from his books. I'd be happy enough to see the back of him, I can tell you. But what do you advise me to do?' she asked, looking at him seriously. 'Shall I go into the country for a bit just to please him; or shall I resolve to stay in London?'

'Take my tip, my dear, and please him just for once. Excuses to come to London are easily made. He can't refuse to let you come to see your poor mother, for instance.' Then for a moment he wondered what the tea-drinkers of Exeter Hall would think of him if they could have heard that pharisaical speech.

She was silent for a few moments; she had thrown herself back in her chair, revealing her tawdry untidiness in dress, her boots only half laced, her hair uncurled, her hands dirty, and her unwashed face so carelessly daubed with glycerine and chalk that she looked almost ghastly.

'I hate the miserable cur!' she said between her teeth. 'He knows I like London, and just because I'm able to have a bit of pleasure, going to the halls and seeing friends, he means to take me out of it.'

'Poor little girl!' the bloated old man exclaimed. 'You don't seem to have a very pleasant time of it.'

'Pleasant! I only wish I hadn't left the theatre,' she answered.

'But you are married, you know,' he said; 'and your husband's a rising man. You ought to be proud of him.'

'Oh! of course I am,' she replied sarcastically. 'What

the papers say of his rubbishy books is all bunkum. He fancies he can write, like lots of other people, and he's become as vain as a peacock. I'm not good enough for him to take to those swell receptions and "At homes." He told me once that I disgraced him, just because we went to see a friend over at Notting Hill, and I drank two glasses of whiskey there. The room was very hot and — well it upset me.'

'I tell you what I think, my dear,' her companion said. 'You take a little too much, sometimes.'

'Ah,' she sighed, 'I'm not well. My nerves are all unstrung, and the slightest drop upsets me. It never used to.'

He saw that her hands trembled, and that she bore outward traces of unusually heavy drinking.

'I think if you were a little more moderate your life at home would be much more happy,' he observed, puffing at his foul pipe, and leering across at her.

'Oh!' she cried, with instant resentment; 'so you're going to deliver a lecture on temperance, are you? Well, you can just dry up once for all, and keep your arguments for the good young men. I please myself, whether it pleases you or not.'

'My dear girl, I assure you I didn't intend my remarks in that sense,' he hastened to assure her.

'You'll lecture me next on my duty towards my husband, I suppose?' she went on angrily. 'You're a pretty one to give anybody advice on the drink question. Reserve that for your next speech to young men at Exeter Hall. You pose beautifully as a moralist, but it's your name, of course, that does it.'

'I merely give you advice,' he protested, with a grim smile. 'I'm sorry you're so unhappy, but I can't assist you, can I?'

'I don't want your precious assistance,' she answered with ill-temper. 'Indeed, it's I who have assisted you, I think you'll admit, when you recollect the money I've scraped out of my housekeeping allowance and given to you when you've been hard up.'

'Yes, yes,' he admitted, moving uneasily in his chair, for he did not wish to quarrel with her. 'You've been a good little girl. It's a pity Rosmead don't appreciate you, but I suppose the detestation is mutual.'

'Of course it is,' she replied. 'Sometimes of late I've almost believed that he's mashed on somebody else, but somehow he's so cold and morose, so utterly weary of everything, that I don't believe there's a woman in this world who could stir up a single spark of love in his heart. It's as hard as stone.'

The baronet crossed his slippered feet, looked at her earnestly, and wheezed heavily.

'Has he never spoken of any woman he knew before he met you?' he asked. 'Of any little romance of his past?'

'I don't remember,' she answered. 'I don't think he has.'

'Has he never mentioned a woman named Fosca?'

In an instant her face blanched to the lips. Her mouth remained open in dismay, and her eyes betrayed a strange terror.

'Fosca? No,' she faltered in a trembling voice. 'Who is Fosca?'

'Fosca Farini, the woman he loves,' the old man replied.

'Who is she? Where does she live?' Lena cried, starting from her chair in an instant, consumed by fierce, uncontrollable jealousy. 'Tell me.'

'No,' the baronet replied calmly, watching her. 'I am not aware of any of the facts. I only know her name. Nothing else. Yet I thought it a fact which you might

care to know. Of course the source of your information must remain a secret. Recollect that.'

'But you know more than you'll tell me,' she cried. 'Come, we are old enough friends that you need have no secrets from me. Does he meet her at those grand receptions?'

'I am aware of nothing further,' he answered, inwardly delighted at having thus aroused her jealousy. 'Now that you know the woman's name, find out for yourself. Only act with discretion. You understand.'

'She's a foreigner, isn't she?'

'I suppose so, from her name.' Then, after a moment's pause, he added, 'I know nothing of her — nothing.'

CHAPTER XX

A 'PAR' IN THE PAPERS

BERTRAM ROSMEAD put down his pen, leaned back in his writing-chair, and, clasping both hands behind his head, read through the little French poem he had just written at the request of a magazine-editor. He had called it 'La Chanson de Bulburie,' and the opening read as follows:—

Au clair de lune, en Tartarie,
Au clair de lune, lentement ;
Chante la svelte Bulburie,
La Fée aux yeux de diamant.
Au clair de lune, sur la grève,
Elle chante, chante sans trêve,
Des airs d'amour, des airs de rêve
Et de langueur,
Sur un luth d'or à voix si pure
Que la mer danse à son murmure,
Et chaque astre bat en mesure,
Comme un grand cœur.

The September afternoon was hot, but the windows of his pleasant little study opened out upon a pretty lawn flanked by a high privet hedge, with a large apple orchard beyond. From outside was wafted in the sweet scent of roses and heliotrope, and the distant sound of children's voices told him that it was already four o'clock, and the village school was over. The room was not large, but was well filled with books, while on the walls were many framed originals of illustrations of his stories in the magazines,

together with a copy of a large picture-poster which at that moment was on half the hoardings in London and the provincial towns, advertising one of his serial stories in a Sunday paper. His writing-table was placed in the embrasure of the window, and from where he sat his eyes rested upon a level expanse of lawn, fresh and green after the rain of the previous night.

The house was a good-sized, old-fashioned one, standing at the end of the pretty village of Malstead, in Sussex, a remote little place, scarcely more than a hamlet, three miles from the rail, and about forty from London. Its surroundings were most picturesque, the views of the Downs from his windows were fine and extensive, and the air was fresh and delightful after those dingy chambers wherein he had been cramped and stifled for so long.

His last book had been a success, and, with the money his publisher had advanced him on account of prospective royalties, he had furnished the place well, and had established a home replete with every comfort. The house was an ideal one for a literary man, standing far back in its own grounds, quiet and secluded, with a fine garden filled with a wealth of old-world flowers. Bertram's study was comfortable; the contracts Mr. Howden had arranged for him were at prices which far exceeded his most sanguine expectations, and he was now well on his way to make a mark in the literary world. The only cloud upon his happiness arose from Lena's constant worry and her growing intemperance. She hated the country, she declared; she termed Malstead 'a dull hole,' and took no interest whatever either in her house, the village, or her husband's work. From the first moment she set foot in the peaceful old place, she detested it; she never once expressed a wish to explore the neighbourhood, and it seemed as though she intended to make her husband's life an increased burden to him. So

many, indeed, were their quarrels that he now adopted the expedient of retiring to his study, locking the door, and working on without interruption. Had he not done this, writing would have been absolutely impossible in such circumstances.

In the diary before him were copies of his contracts for serial stories, short stories, and novels, sufficient to keep him busily employed for the next three years, and he found he could work twice as well in the country as he had done in London, for his head was clearer, and when he entered his study at seven o'clock in the morning, he often wrote as much before breakfasting as he did during a whole day in Dane's Inn. He had striven valiantly to place all thought of Fosca from his mind, and had nearly succeeded. In one of the drawers of his writing-table there reposed a portrait of her, which she had sent him a couple of months ago without word or letter. It had been posted in New York, and from that he knew she was in the States, where 'Il Parpaglione' was creating a great furore. Sometimes, in his melancholy hours, he would take it out, and gaze upon it long and earnestly, then, sighing, he would lock it away again as the one secret of his heart.

The French verses satisfied him, after one or two alterations. Then, placing them in an envelope, he put the letter aside, ready for the post. Again he drew his manuscript paper before him, ran his fingers slowly through his hair, and, taking up his pen, recommenced writing the conclusion of a London mystery which was to appear in the great syndicate of newspapers in England, America, Australia, India, and China, for which he had contracted to write it.

For fully half-an-hour he wrote on, until a voice at his elbow said—

'Your tea, sir.'

He turned and found Lucy, the dark-eyed housemaid, neat in her frilled cap and apron, with his cup of tea upon a tray. Like most men who write, he could not live without tea, and at half-past four it was his habit to swallow a cupful as a stimulant.

He took it from her, and, drinking it without putting down his pen, replaced the cup on the tray. Then he bent to resume the dialogue in which he had been interrupted. The girl, however, did not leave the room, and he turned and glanced at her inquiringly.

‘Please, sir,’ she exclaimed in a faltering tone, ‘I hope I don’t disturb you, but I’d like to speak to you a moment.’

‘Well, what is it, Lucy?’ he asked, placing his pen upon the blotting pad, and regarding her with some surprise.

‘I’m very sorry, sir, but I shall have to leave!’

‘Why?’

‘Because of mistress. Life with her is simply wretched. Half the day she doesn’t know what she does or says. And you, sir, what a life you lead! Excuse me for saying so.’

He looked at the maid, and stifled a sigh.

‘So even you sympathise with me, Lucy?’ he murmured. ‘Yes; my life is not over-pleasant, but, of course, there are little domestic troubles in every family. Have you given notice to your mistress?’

‘Yes, sir. I did so after luncheon, and she said that I could go at once, if I liked.’

‘But you won’t go?’ he urged. ‘Since you have been with us, I’m sure you’ve been an excellent maid. I’ll talk to my wife, and see whether we can’t settle things amicably.’

‘Mistress has gone to London,’ the girl said.

‘Gone to London!’ he exclaimed, surprised.

‘Yes; she went by the two o’clock train from East

Grinstead, and told me to tell you, that as you refused to let her go up to see her mother, she had gone without your sanction, and that she should stay two or three days.'

He was silent. At luncheon he had found her in a half-intoxicated state, and she had demanded him to write to London for a fresh supply of whiskey, but he had refused; whereupon she had instantly flown into an angry passion, and began to abuse him in such a manner, while Lucy was waiting at table, that he had risen when half-through his meal, as he was often compelled to do, and seek peace in his study. Since then he had not seen her, but she had apparently made this an excuse to go to London. He attributed her craving for London to the fact that she could obtain drink there, while at Malstead there was only one village inn, of so low a character that she could not with any sense of propriety enter there. He never once suspected her of having any further attraction in town. Honest, upright, and just, he always judged others from his own standpoint.

'Cook says that she's going, too,' continued Lucy. 'From morning till night mistress is nagging at her, and never seems pleased with anything.'

'It is my misfortune,' her master answered. 'I regret this very much, and if it lay in my power I would remedy it. You, however, are well aware of my position.'

'Yes, sir,' answered the girl; 'cook and me are always saying how sorry we are for you. She never lets you have a moment's rest.'

He smiled bitterly. There was a grimness in this sympathy, on the part of maidservants, for a man whose name was known to half the reading public of the English-speaking race, a man who had been hailed by critics as one of the most popular writers of the day. Even his two servants pitied him.

‘I want you to grant me a favour,’ he said, speaking politely, as he ever did to those about him. ‘I know this is a very uncomfortable household, but I trust that neither cook nor yourself will gossip to other servants in the neighbourhood about my wife’s little weakness. I’m sure you will both carry out my wishes in this respect.’

‘I don’t intend to breathe a word to a soul,’ Lucy answered; ‘and I’m sure when I tell cook she won’t utter a syllable. You’ve always been so kind and considerate towards us.’

‘Did my wife leave no further message?’

‘No, sir.’

‘But she had no money,’ he observed. He would not allow her to have money, for she only spent it in drink. Of late he had taken to paying the household expenses himself.

‘She said that you refused to give her a farthing, and she borrowed six shillings from cook.’

‘Six shillings! Why, that’s only just the fare,’ he observed.

‘She said that she could pawn her rings and bracelet when she got to town,’ the girl replied, with some hesitation.

His lips compressed. In his dark, serious eyes there was a suspicion of tears.

‘Very well,’ he said hoarsely. ‘Now that she’s gone off in this manner, I suppose there’s no stopping her. But I — I’m busy now, Lucy,’ and with a lump rising in his throat, he turned towards his table again, while the neat maidservant went out, not without noticing the effect her words had had upon him.

When she had gone he rose, and, standing at the window, gazed sadly across the lawn. Here, in this rural peace, he had all that made life enjoyable, — health, fame, comfort, —

all except the one thing he yearned most for, the love of a true-hearted, kind, and sympathetic woman. Even the words of this dark-eyed, rather smart maid had gratified him, because, lonely man that he was, a word of sympathy always touched his heart deeply, piercing the armour of callousness with which he shielded himself from his wife's cruel words.

Lena had taken her jewels, those little trinkets he had bought as a pleasant surprise for her after so much scraping and screwing, often denying himself cigarettes in order to save money to purchase them. He stood motionless, pondering deeply.

All was useless. He had taken that house and furnished it well in order to keep her from her besetting sin, but she had evaded him. She had gone to London to plunge into that debauchery which so sickened him. As he had sat opposite her at luncheon she had jeered at him, saying —

‘You believe yourself a fine gentleman, setting up this country house. But it won't last for long. You'll soon have to go back to work again in London. Recollect my words.’

He wondered whether such fate would ever befall him. He shuddered when he recollected the dark, dismal den wherein he had toiled for so long, that stuffy room where not a ray of sunlight penetrated, and where the only light was that reflected by mirrors hung outside the windows. No; while he had breath he would strive to keep away from London. Slowly, but surely, he had grown famous, and in London many houses were open to him, but with Lena ever hampering him, he had resolved to cut himself off from it all. The ‘Vagabond’ dinners were the only festivities he now attended. All invitations he firmly declined, pleading press of work or some other equally good excuse.

He left the study and slowly crossed into the drawing-

room, a good-sized apartment, furnished with great taste and considerable elegance. The Chippendale furniture was upholstered in blue silk, the cosy-corner, in white and terra-cotta, was wide and comfortable, with curtains to keep off draughts; a piano stood cross-wise, and upon the side-table were some signed portraits of notable authors. About the room were many curios and nick-nacks. The niches above the cosy-corner were filled with old oriental china, and here and there in shelves and odd corners were scattered books of all sorts. The carpet was soft, the air which came in from the garden was warm and heavy with the perfume of flowers, and altogether the room was an apartment which any woman might have envied.

He glanced around it, and sighed as his eye caught an object upon the little pearl-inlaid coffee-stool standing near the cosy-corner. It was an empty glass, and it told its own story.

He stood in the centre of the room and surveyed it.

‘Only two months here,’ he murmured dejectedly, ‘yet it must all go — all. I’ve tried every expedient except one, that of travelling. I’ll sell all this, and take her abroad,’ and he sighed. ‘Once,’ he went on speaking to himself, ‘once I thought I might live and be happy in a home like this, but it is impossible. She craves for life and movement. Well, she shall have it. I’ll store my writing-table and my books, and after to-morrow our belongings will be carried in a couple of trunks. I was a wanderer long ago, and it seems my lot to go forth wandering again.’

Then he was silent for a long while, staring aimlessly at the carpet.

‘It shall never be said that I did not try every expedient,’ he exclaimed, rising suddenly. ‘I’ll take her from her old associations and surroundings, and see whether or not I can create within her some interest in life beyond that of drink.’

It's hard, very hard, after all this expense, that I should be compelled to cast aside my work, travel and do odd bits of writing at intervals. I had looked forward to a life of peace, a life in which I could reflect and produce a great book, but alas! all is in vain. In all these years I've only sown the wind.'

And rising slowly he made his way back to the study where, for the next hour, he sat writing letters to his agent, and to other persons with whom he had business relations, announcing the fact that he was going abroad immediately, and would acquaint them with his new address in due course.

'I suppose I shall get a mere nothing for all these household gods,' he said aloud, with a bitter laugh, 'yet, in the circumstances, I suppose I'm better without them. In future I shall only work to live, without thought of happiness or contentment, for that is debarred me for ever.'

In that instant he had recollected Fosca, and the strange secret by which her lips were sealed. That recollection brought with it a tide of wild emotions which he tried in vain to stem.

At last he finished his letters, and passed out into the garden, where he sat beneath the great shady walnut tree. It was his last day in the home wherein he worked so well. On the morrow he would leave it and become a wanderer. He regretted deeply, but he saw it was the only course to pursue. He had made a mistake in endeavouring to bring Lena into quietude, and it was best to rectify it forthwith.

Therefore, true to his resolve, the morning Continental mail which left Charing Cross three days later bore away Mr. and Mrs. Rosmead to an undecided destination, while all the papers a few days afterwards duly chronicled the fact that the popular writer had left to spend the autumn

and winter in the south, his health being impaired by overwork.

The public believed the latter story, while their popular romancer, of whose health the papers spoke with such concern, nursed the poignant sorrow locked within his own heart.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PHARISEE

BERTRAM stood at his window on the Promenade des Anglais, at Nice, and gazed reflectively across the wide expanse of blue, sunlit sea. It was late in January, the period when Nice is literally a town of violets and mimosa, putting on its best appearance, in preparation for the arrival of King Carnival. The season was at its height; the mad gaiety of the Riviera would soon culminate in the battles of *confetti*, and of flowers, in the races, yachting, and masked balls at the Opera, and, in a few short weeks, everyone would fly from the 'Azure Coast' northward, to escape the intolerable heat.

Of all resorts on the Riviera, Nice has the most varied attractions. Mentone is essentially the quiet retreat of invalids; Monte Carlo is too reckless to suit the majority who go south for the whole season; Beaulieu is too small and select; and Cannes is too full of perennial *cliques*. But Nice is a merry, cosmopolitan place, where the ladies can show off their Paris-made gowns to advantage, along the Promenade des Anglais, the sunniest place in Europe, with beautiful environs, and roads which are a perfect paradise to the cyclist. The young can ride, cycle, promenade, flirt, and otherwise enjoy themselves, while the aged can lounge upon the seats, in the warm sunshine, content in the knowledge that, if there is warmth anywhere in Europe, they obtain it, and that, while rain and fogs make London un-

bearable, they have a blue, cloudless sky, bright, balmy air, and flowers everywhere.

Since leaving England, they had been to Biarritz, to Pau, to Bagnères de Luchon, that lovely little town, nestling among the giant, snow-capped Pyrenees, and, travelling along to Marseilles, had arrived in Nice early in December, taking up their quarters in a *pension*, at the further end of the Promenade des Anglais — the one with the great garden in front, which is so much frequented by the English. From the windows of both their rooms they had beautiful views of the Mediterranean, and, at first, Lena was charmed with the place, delighted with its brightness and warmth, in contrast with an English winter, interested in the fine shops, in the Casino, in the concerts on the Jetée Promenade, and in her neighbours at *table d'hôte*.

Each morning they went out together, walking in the sunshine, along the sea-front, to the Place Masséna, and taking the tram back, along the narrow Rue de France, in time for luncheon. In the afternoon, while she dozed, her husband wrote, and in the evening, after dinner, they would go forth to one or other of the *cafés* to take their coffee.

To Lena, this life was a pleasant change, after that in England, and Bertram began to congratulate himself that he had acted wisely in taking her away. She still drank whiskey, but not to quite such an extent, for she was now compelled to pay seven francs a bottle for it, while gin was unobtainable, or, at least, she could not discover where to buy it. For almost the first time since their marriage, she acknowledged herself contented, and so happy Bertram became, that, on those quiet afternoons, among those bright, invigorating surroundings, he wrote with greater ease, and more force, than he had done, even at Malstead. Indeed, a serial story which he had just finished, and delivered to

the syndicate who had contracted for his work, was declared by them to be the best romance he had hitherto produced, and he felt confident that, at last, peace had come to him.

The morning was bright and cloudless, the sea a deep blue, the sun warm, and, as he stood looking out, there came up from below the voices of a couple of Italian mandolinists, of that tribe of itinerant musicians who visit all the hotels and *pensions* regularly, each morning, and serenade the visitors, who, in return, throw ten-centime pieces from their windows. To the accompaniment of their instruments, they were singing that charming old Tuscan song —

Su mare luccica
L' astro d' argento,
Placida è l' onda,
Prospero il vento ;

Venite all' agile
Barchetta mia ;
Santa Lucia,
Santa Lucia ! . . .

Lena, standing beside him in her dressing-gown, for she had just come from her room, exclaimed —

‘How beautiful Italian is, and what a sweet tune! I must give them a penny,’ and she tossed one out, receiving a courteous bow and a smile in return.

Then, with the long windows still open, although it was January, they sat down to their coffee.

‘What a lovely day!’ she observed. ‘The sun is really hot,’ and she drew her chair away into the shadow. ‘This is just the day for Monte Carlo. You promised you’d take me over again soon. Let’s go to-day.’

‘Certainly,’ he answered, ‘if you wish. We’ll get lunch over quickly, and catch the one o’clock train.’

They had been to the gaming-rooms several times, for

he had in view a series of stories dealing with Monte Carlo and its fascinations, and was obtaining the local colour, and knowledge of *roulette* and *trente-et-quarante* necessary for writing them. Once or twice he had played *roulette*, with the minimum stakes, with varying success, but never risking more than fifty or sixty francs at a time. Lena, however, was very unlucky. Whenever she placed a five-franc piece on the red, the ball was certain to drop into one of the little black spaces, and if she played on the 'impair,' the 'pair' was certain to turn up.

'You won't play, of course,' her husband added. 'Up to the present, you've lost quite a hundred francs.'

'I'll just try another twenty, and, if I lose, I'll never play again,' she declared. 'I can't be in those rooms, where everybody seems to be winning money, without having a try myself.'

'One hundred francs are sufficient for us to lose,' he observed.

'But you've won two or three hundred, so we've lost nothing, after all,' she argued, pouting, as she stirred her coffee.

'Very well,' he said, good-humouredly. 'I'll give you twenty francs, on the understanding that, if you lose, you won't play again.'

'All right,' she answered, and they finished their coffee and rolls, after which she dressed her hair, while he remained in their little sitting-room, writing.

It was two o'clock when they ascended the carpeted steps of the Casino at Monte Carlo, and, after obtaining their *carte d'admission* from the pair of austere-looking gentlemen in the bureau of the Administration, they deposited their coats, and, walking across the atrium, entered the great gaming-rooms. As the door opened to admit them, the hot, fevered atmosphere — that peculiar, fœtid

odour of combined perspiration and perfume, which ever pervades those rooms—greeted their nostrils. Already the place was crowded. All the *roulette* tables were in full swing, and around them were, sitting and standing, excited crowds, awaiting, in breathless anxiety, the click of the ivory ball as it dropped into one of the little spaces on the great wheel of red and black, bringing them fortune or loss.

Although the sun was bright and beautiful outside, the windows were all carefully curtained, rendering the heavy gilt of the place a trifle dingy, while ventilation seemed to be entirely overlooked by the otherwise diligent attendants. The loud jingle of coin, the rustle of bank-notes, the monotonous cry of the croupiers, and the subdued murmur of many voices, filled the rooms, as together they strolled across the polished floor to one of the side tables, and stood for some minutes watching the game.

A narrow-faced, clean-shaven man had been playing with the maximum upon the simple chance of the black, and had been winning heavily. This had attracted a crowd of those idlers, mostly of the tweed-dressed, English tourist class, who go to Monte Carlo once and throw away a few five-franc pieces for the fun of the thing, and in order to say, on their return to their suburban or provincial homes, that they have 'been playing at Monte Carlo.' Three times in succession this man placed the maximum on the black, together with a thousand francs on the first dozen numbers, and each time he won on both chances, an illustration of a marvellous run of luck.

Suddenly, a man who had lost his last piece rose from his chair next the croupier, at the end of the table, and, in an instant, Bertram took the seat.

Then, turning at once to his wife, he asked her whether she would sit there.

‘No,’ she answered. ‘I don’t think I will play, for I’ve no luck. I’ll stand behind here.’

‘Very well,’ he said, and taking from his pocket a hundred-franc note, he handed it to the croupier, and received twenty five-franc pieces in exchange. Four of them he handed to Lena, and with the rest commenced to play.

‘*Messieurs, faites vos jeux!*’ cried the croupier, in a nerveless tone, and Bertram placed his first silver piece upon the little space before him, marked ‘12 P,’ or, in other words, staked upon the first dozen of the thirty-six numbers upon the wheel.

Silver, gold, and notes were flung into the squares, upon the red, the black, the ‘*pair*,’ the ‘*passé*,’ the ‘*impair*,’ and the ‘*manque*,’ the ball was sent on its way around the revolving disc, while, an instant later, the same monotonous voice cried —

‘*Rien ne va plus!*’

There was a few seconds’ silence, then the ivory ball gave a jump, and fell with a loud click.

‘*Dix-sept! Noir! Impair et manque!*’ cried the wearied voice, and, at the same moment, the rakes drew away the money that was lost, Bertram’s stake included. He had bet upon the first dozen, but the number seventeen was in the second dozen.

Experience had taught him to play carefully, therefore he did not double his stake, but merely placed another piece upon the second dozen, and a second piece upon the first column.

‘*Trois! Rouge! Impair et manque!*’ cried the croupier, as the ball fell.

He had lost on the dozen, but won upon the column double his stake, therefore he had won back all he had lost.

Again he played, this time ten francs on the last dozen,

and a gold piece was flung to him when the number twenty-seven turned up.

From that moment he began to win, not heavily, for he never staked more than a twenty-franc piece at a time, yet, by degrees, his little pile of gold increased, and Lena, standing near him, was amazed at the marvellous luck which had so suddenly come to him. He played always on the dozens, and it seemed as though he could not lose. Now and then a twenty-franc piece would be swept away to swell the bank, but, in the majority of cases, he received back double his stake. Five times in rapid succession he left two twenty-franc pieces upon the middle dozen, and five times the middle dozen won, thus winning four hundred francs in a few minutes.

He looked up and saw, around the table, a crowd of pale, excited faces, but he himself was too excited to notice anything but the progress of the ball along the inside of the bowl-shaped *roulette* table. His cheeks were slightly flushed, and, in the greed for gain that had taken possession of his senses, he forgot his wife — forgot everything, except the fact that he was now winning, gaining money more easily than he had ever gained it in his whole life before.

During a lull in the play, he counted his gold into little piles of ten pieces, and found that he had nearly four thousand francs.

A pretty, elegantly-dressed woman, — one of the Paris *demi-monde*, judging from her dress and jewels, — sitting opposite him, raised her head, and laughed across to him. She, too, had won heavily, while all the other persons at the table had been continuously losing.

‘*Messieurs, faites vos jeux!*’ the croupier cried at last, and, with knit brows, Bertram placed a louis on the first dozen.

The *cocotte* placed a louis beside his, believing that to follow his play would bring her further fortune.

The wheel was spun, the ball fell upon the number twenty-nine. Both had lost.

The *cocotte* laughed at him. She was young, fair-haired, not more than twenty-three, in a blouse of pale blue silk and lace, a striking black hat, and long white gloves, with magnificent bracelets upon her wrists. But, in an instant, with all a gambler's superstition, he believed that the smiles of Aspasia brought evil fortune.

Again he played, this time on the middle dozen, and followed by the gay, laughing woman opposite him.

They lost. The woman laughed again, as if gleeful that his luck should have deserted him.

He tried the last dozen, doubling his stake in an effort to recoup himself. The laughing girl in blue did the same.

'*Onze! Noir! Impair et manque!*' cried the croupier, and in a second the rake came out, and swept the four pieces of gold away.

She raised her eyes to his in a strange, Sphinx-like smile. Each time she played with him she had only brought him evil fortune.

'Zero!' he cried, flinging a gold piece to the further end of the table.

The *cocotte* did not fancy such a remote chance, and placed her louis on the first dozen.

Once more the ball dropped into one of the little compartments of the wheel.

'*Cinq! Rouge! Impair et manque!*' cried the wearied voice.

The woman had won, while he had lost. All luck seemed to have deserted him. He glanced furtively at her.

Her eyes were fixed upon him, and she laughed again.

He moved uneasily in his chair, and inwardly cursed her.

‘*Messieurs, faites vos jeux!*’ cried a sharp voice, in unfamiliar tones, and Bertram saw that the croupiers had changed. The man who now held the ball in his hand was elderly and dissipated-looking, with a stoop, plainly acquired by his avocation of croupier through many years. Rosmead disliked his look. His face was hard and cold, and he had an instinctive feeling that all good fortune had gone from him.

The woman, although her face was young and handsome, irritated him. She seemed to be directing the ridicule of others upon him. In desperation he put down four louis on the middle dozen.

Ere his hand left the cloth, her white-gloved fingers had staked a single louis beside his. Before the ball fell he knew he had lost, and, sure enough, the croupier a moment later cried —

‘*Trente-cinq! Noir! Impair et passe!*’

Again the woman laughed lightly at him, as though jeering at his ill-fortune.

There was once more a lull in the game. A blustering man had handed in a number of notes to change for gold, and was distributing a thousand francs over the various numbers.

‘Hulloa, Lena, my dear girl!’ exclaimed a man’s coarse voice, distinctly, behind him. ‘Who’d have thought of finding you here — at Monte Carlo, too! I hope your husband isn’t about.’

‘Hush!’ cried Lena’s voice. ‘Hush! Go away! For God’s sake, go away!’

The words brought Bertram instantly back to a consciousness of things about him. He turned quickly in his chair, and saw standing beside Lena a man whom he had

never before met, a stout, jaunty, florid-faced stranger, in a suit of light grey, with a grey felt hat in his hand.

His lips compressed, and his brow darkened.

He pushed the gold before him towards the croupier, and asked for notes. The latter came along, folded in half, and balanced at the end of the long black rake. He counted them swiftly. There were fourteen hundred francs.

The stranger had apparently not understood that Lena's husband was present, and therefore had not moved away.

He rose, and as he did so his eyes met those of the *cocotte*.

The woman laughed again.

With a smothered imprecation, he turned from her, and walked to his wife's side. The curious, familiar manner in which this man had addressed her, had aroused his suspicions, and he stood by in silence, glancing at the stranger with a look of inquiry.

Not until that instant did Lena realise that her husband had joined them, and her cheeks went a deep red as she glanced from one man to the other.

'Do you know this gentleman?' inquired Bertram quickly, as the man was turning away.

'Certainly,' she answered, striving to still her wildly-beating heart. 'Let me introduce you. Sir Douglas Vizard — my husband.'

Bertram bowed coldly, without a word, while the elder man, with that merry laugh he could assume at will, expressed his delight at meeting him.

'I've known your wife for a long, long time,' he explained. 'We are quite old friends, but we haven't met for a year or two now. When she was at the Adelphi, long ago, I often used to see her. I'm president of the Mission to Theatrical Workers, don't you know?' Then,

turning to Lena, he inquired in a sympathetic tone, 'And how's your poor sister? Better, I hope?'

'The last letter from home says that the fogs have made her ill again,' young Mrs. Rosmead answered. 'Have you been on the Riviera long?'

'Since a month ago. I come here every year,' he replied laughing. 'There's no place half so good in winter in the whole of Europe.'

With this opinion Bertram agreed. When his wife had introduced this man, he had been taken by surprise, for he knew Sir Douglas Vizard, by repute, as a prominent Baptist, a constant speaker at revival meetings, and a most energetic worker in all Dissenting religious movements. A man of his character would certainly not approve of the play carried on in those gilded *salons*. Yet, as he glanced at him, his quick eyes detected, sticking out of his vest pocket, one of those little cards, ruled in columns and marked 'R' and 'N,' whereon gamblers register the winning numbers, to guide them in their play.

This puzzled him, as did also the familiar manner in which he had addressed his wife. She had never spoken of him as a friend, therefore his suspicion became deep-rooted, and he grew resentful that this man should have thus addressed her. Her theatre life was of the past, and he did not desire the fact that she had been a supernumerary at a theatre to be raked up again, especially by this loudly-dressed, blustering old man.

'Have you been winning?' Sir Douglas asked him, with a merry twinkle in his grey eyes.

'No,' snapped Rosmead, 'losing, and I wish you good-day.'

Then, taking his wife's arm, he walked off, and straight out of the rooms.

'Who is that man, Lena?' he demanded fiercely, when

they gained the atrium, wherein men who had lost were pacing feverishly up and down, smoking cigarettes, before returning to endeavour to retrieve their losses.

‘Sir Douglas Vizard, the president of our Mission,’ she answered promptly. The baronet had ingeniously given her a cue which she now followed. ‘When I was at the Adelphi, he used to come a lot to the theatre, and get the girls to go to tea-fights, in a hall somewhere off Drury Lane. I never went. As you know, prayer and tea don’t mix well with me,’ and she laughed at her own sorry attempt at wit.

‘Then you know him quite intimately, I suppose?’ he said.

‘I only know him by meeting him at the theatre. He was good friends with old Sidney, the manager, and used to be behind a lot. There was a league of ladies who used to hold afternoons for the girls, and try and convert them by giving them tea, lemonade, milk, and buns; but a glass of bitter and a bit of fried fish would have been much more acceptable. At the theatre, he used to be called Old Shuffle-slippers, for he came there once with a boot split up, because he had the gout.’

‘But I heard him speak to you,’ he cried angrily. ‘He addressed you with most impertinent familiarity.’

‘I didn’t notice it,’ she declared. ‘What did he say?’

‘He called you “dear girl,” and expressed a hope that I was not present,’ Bertram said.

‘Well, that ain’t much, is it?’ she protested. ‘Surely you know enough of theatres to know that girls on the stage are always addressed by the manager and others as “my dear.” That means nothing in the dramatic world.’

He looked at her with a swift, hard glance as they descended the steps from the Casino, and crossed to the Café de Paris, where the band was playing.

‘I believe you are deceiving me, Lena,’ he exclaimed in a strained voice.

‘I’m not,’ she declared, looking him boldly in the face ; ‘I’ve told you the truth. You can disbelieve me if you like ; it makes no difference to me.’

‘You are not lying to me — eh ?’ he inquired, looking her straight in the face with those dark, penetrating eyes that could read character at a glance.

But she met his gaze with unwavering eyes, and, smiling at his suspicions, answered :

‘No, Bertram, I’ve told you the truth. I may have one failing — that of drink. Surely, however, you do not suspect me of infidelity !’

But he walked on without replying, and in silence they took their seats at one of the little tables outside the gay café, where the strains of waltz music defeated any attempt at conversation.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LILY CITY

THROUGH the mad reign of King Carnival Lena and her husband remained in Nice. They watched the entry of his Tinsel Majesty into the town on that February night, his progress down the illuminated Avenue de la Gare amid the fanfare of trumpets, the thumping of drums, the light of torches, and the glare of green and red fires, and were present at his arrival in the Place Masséna amid the plaudits of the thousands assembled on the specially-erected stands. They witnessed the giant King of Folly's enthronement beneath the great triumphal arch beyond the Casino, where for a few days he would sit to preside over the various festivities before being finally immolated amid the dancing of clown, columbine, and all sorts and conditions of revels.

They went forth on the Sunday afternoon following the opening of Carnival, and watched the grand procession of cars and humorous groups which paraded the town, with many brass bands, mostly playing different tunes, for music at Carnival is the reverse of choice, the chief object of the musicians being to create the greatest possible noise with their brass instruments, regardless of either time or tune. The groups on horseback and the groups on foot were notable for their variety and the taste displayed in costume, for nowhere in the world is so much money spent over Carnival finery as in this centre of Riviera gaiety. The

colours that year were that pale shade of green known as *vert d'eau*, combined with mauve, and every shop displayed dominoes of those artistic tints, from the rich satin ones in the Quai St. Jean-Baptiste to the glazed cambric ones hung outside the shops in the old Italian quarter, and assumed by the Niçois themselves.

Lena was delighted. The excitement of the battle of *confetti*, when she, like everyone else who went forth, wore a wire mask to protect her face from the hard white pellets, proved such that she bought bagsful of *confetti*, and pelted people in return, while in the two battles of flowers—both favoured with superb weather—they stood with the crowd on the Promenade des Anglais, and bombarded the people in carriages with those little bunches of violets, stocks, and carnations sold for the purpose. It was a fortnight of wild revelry, in which Nice ran mad with harmless frolic, and remained in a state of good-humoured lawlessness; but very soon after His Majesty had been consigned to the flames, people began to leave for the north again.

The dying embers of the Tinsel King are emblematic of the season's end.

Bertram wanted to remain till April, and finish the book he was writing, but Lena soon grew tired of Nice, and began to crave for London. Daily she grumbled at all which a few weeks ago gave her pleasure. She termed Nice 'a wretched hole,' and declared that the sea at Margate was better than along the Littoral, that there was no music-hall in Nice, and that to charge two francs each to enter the municipal Casino was nothing short of an imposition. One paid a shilling to go to the Crystal Palace, she said, and she liked that far better. Possibly the latter was because she had one evening lost twenty francs at the game of billiards played at the Casino.

Day by day her discontent increased, until her husband

was compelled to acknowledge that he had been mistaken in believing that she was happy amid these new surroundings. As he sat writing, she would stand at the window, look out upon the half-deserted Promenade across the garden, filled with oranges and palms, and abuse the place to the full extent of her not altogether choice vocabulary.

One morning, towards the end of March, when he found her with whiskey she had surreptitiously ordered from the wine merchant in the Rue de la Poste, he in desperation suggested that they should go and stay in Paris through the spring.

‘I hate Paris,’ she answered. ‘No, let’s go back to London — good old London is the best place on earth.’

‘Why do you hate Paris?’ he asked in some surprise. ‘You don’t know it.’

She glanced at him sharply.

‘Oh! of course I don’t; but from what you’ve told me about the life there, I know I shouldn’t like it,’ she answered with a laugh. ‘I want to go back to London.’

‘Why?’

‘Because it’s cruel of you to keep me away from my mother and all my friends. Look at mother’s last letter. She’s very queer, and says she has a presentiment that she’ll never see me again. And poor Nell. She’s very ill too. I must go.’

‘No,’ he answered firmly. ‘You will not return to London. If you don’t fancy Paris — a place which you’ve never tried — we’ll go to Florence. It’s beautiful there in spring.’

‘That’s in Italy. I hate Italians,’ she answered quickly, her eyes fixed upon him as if to watch the effect of her words.

‘It’s the most beautiful place in April and May in all Europe,’ he said. ‘Thousands of English go on there

from Cannes and Nice. We will go — in a couple of days, if you like.'

'No,' she cried peevishly. 'Let's go back to London. I've had enough of being abroad for a time.'

'No,' he repeated. 'You will come with me to Florence.'

'Oh! of course,' she burst forth. 'You think of nobody but yourself. You, who haven't any relatives except your old aunt, who's too proud to look at me, don't understand how it is I want to get back and see my own people.'

'They write to you every week, and the money I allow them has never once fallen into arrear since our marriage,' he observed.

'Yes, you always throw that in my face,' she cried petulantly. 'If you'd have let me stay at the theatre, you might have kept your miserable few shillings a week in your pocket. I could have earned it, and given it to them.'

'Don't talk nonsense, Lena,' he answered quite calmly. 'When you talk like that you only regret it afterwards. We will go to Florence, and see whether we cannot have an interesting time there.'

'I don't want to go,' she whined.

'I have decided,' he answered. 'We shall leave here in two days' time.'

So a week later they had installed themselves in a quiet and eminently respectable *pension* a few doors from the Piazza Santa Maria Novella in old Firenze, that ancient Lily City which possesses an eternal charm, that city of ponderous monuments of the past, the centre of all the arts and of all the beauty of fair Italy.

The *pension* was small, kept by a round-faced, merry Florentine who had once been proprietor of the 'Grey-

hound,' that well-known hostelry at Hampton Court, and who after five years had returned to his beloved Florence comfortably off, and now kept on the *pension* for the benefit of his two youthful sons, whom he intended should become hotel-keepers. Only a dozen persons sat down daily to *table d'hôte*, and these included two regular boarders, a captain of infantry, and a bank manager. The others were Americans, Norwegians, French, and Germans, a truly cosmopolitan and rather pleasant party. But from the first Lena hated it. She commenced by taking a violent dislike to all her fellow-guests, and refusing to enter the *salon* for music after dinner. She held herself aloof from all, moped in her room, and declared that Florence was hateful.

With difficulty he persuaded her to accompany him one afternoon to the Ufizzi Gallery, but after the first room she declared that pictures bored her, and that half of them were Madonnas, in which she could take no concern. She therefore sat in one of the corridors, and with a bored expression waited while he hurried through the various rooms with a superficial glance at their priceless treasures.

'I can't understand how it is that you have no interest in those wonderful pictures,' he said, as he rejoined her and they descended the stairs.

'I'm tired and thirsty,' she answered. 'Let's go across to the "Gambrinus" and get a drink. They sell gin there.'

'Gin!' he echoed with a slight sigh. 'Always gin, Lena?'

'Well, I can't stand your washy vermouth or thin German beer. Surely I can please myself?'

'It's four o'clock,' he said, glancing up at the clock on the Palazzo Vecchio. 'Why not have a cup of tea?'

'Oh, tea be hanged!' she answered. 'I tried it yesterday, and it was like dish-water. These Italians can't make tea. You've said so yourself.'

So his visit to the Uffizzi was a failure. He had promised himself a treat among those masterpieces that afternoon, for as an ex-student of art he took the most intense interest in those old masters which Teddy, Jean, and himself discussed so frequently long ago in their sky-parlour beside the Seine. But, as usual, Lena marred his pleasure, and prevented him inspecting those pictures which he had longed for years to see. Art did not appeal to her. She looked upon the pictures merely as so many faded, grimy paintings, and wondered what beauty people could find in them. Over the dinner-table the women raved about the Madonnas of Raphael, Filippo Lippi, Fra Bartolommeo, Giovanni Bellini, Mantegna, the Venus of Titian, the Adoration of the Magi by Ghirlandajo, Michael Angelo's Holy Family, and other pictures of world-wide fame. But Lena declared that these women discussed them, first, in order to show superior knowledge, and, secondly, because it was considered good form to do so.

She was ignorant of everything pertaining to art. One of the women, a pleasant, middle-aged American, had on one occasion asked her across the table what she thought of Michael Angelo's David, whereupon, in order to show herself equal to all this technical gossip on art, she had replied —

‘I don't think so very much of it. The colouring seems to me a little faulty here and there.’

The American woman stared at her, surprised that she should allow herself to betray such crass ignorance, and the other women at the table smiled in sarcasm. Her husband, in conversation with a man at his other hand, overheard the question and its answer, and bit his lip in mortification. But he took no notice of it until after dinner, when they were in their own room. Then he explained to her that ‘David’ was not a picture at all, but a statue, the sculptor's masterpiece!

He tried to interest her by taking her by the electric tram, that wonderful piece of road-making, up to the heights of Fiesole, whence can be obtained that superb view of Arno's valley, with the time-mellowed red roofs of Florence, with Giotto's magnificent campanile and Brunelleschi's wondrous dome lying far below, and beyond the purple Apennines and the rich wine-lands of Chianti. She wandered through the little place, entered the cathedral, where some children were being christened, and afterwards visited the Etruscan amphitheatre, but she declared herself tired, and that the view was not worth the excursion. To the Certosa, the crumbling old monastery away in the smiling Val d'Enza, they made an excursion, and were taken around by a fat, humorous old monk; in the Cascine they drove at the fashionable hour, and took pleasant jaunts to inspect the old church of San Miniato, and to explore the beauties of Signa and the wine-lands beyond Prato.

By every means in his power he sought to entertain her, taking her out walking or driving each day, and writing at night after dinner, although wearied by the excursions. Still, she was not satisfied. Day by day she grumbled, and declared herself sick and tired of Italy, while at night, before going to bed, she would drink herself into a state of semi-helplessness. Gradually the bitter truth became impressed upon him that, by selling his home and incurring all the heavy expenses he had done, he had achieved nothing. All his well-meant efforts had been in vain. He had tried to reform her; he had struggled valiantly to create within her some object in life beyond her fatal *penchant* for spirits; he had denied himself everything, all the peace and comfort which he had hoped to obtain in his country home, yet without result. Her ill-temper, her constant worry, and her intemperance became more pronounced than ever. Each night she drank sufficient whiskey to upset the strongest

man; each night she swore at him and abused him until the servants gossiped about it, and quite a scandal was created in the *pension*.

Bertram was not slow to notice that the other women now scarcely ever spoke to his wife at table, and even the men regarded him with pity. She had disgraced him here, as she always did; therefore, with a heavy heart, he one day allowed her to have her way, and left Florence. Such, indeed, was her mad haste to get back to London that she would not allow him to break the journey, and they actually travelled right through by way of Milan, Bâle, and Calais, arriving at Charing Cross half dead with fatigue. But she cared nothing. That very evening, two hours after their arrival, she compelled him to accompany her to a bar in the Strand for a glass of port. She was delighted, and laughed with eager glee, for she had won, and was back again in her own murky atmosphere of London.

They stayed at the First Avenue Hotel, and that night she ordered a bottle of whiskey, and consumed greater part of it before retiring to rest. In her drunken condition, her pleasure at finding herself in London was succeeded by a wild outburst of fury, because he attempted to take the bottle from her. She stamped her foot in rage, cursed him, and fought for possession of it, scratching his face in her mad passion.

He allowed her to have her way, and, leaving the room without a word, dabbed his cheek with his handkerchief and descended to the smoke-room until she should fall asleep. All his efforts had been without avail, he sadly reflected, as he smoked his cigarette in a corner of the great room where men were chatting and drinking.

In the morning, however, he said nothing, but after breakfast went down to the Strand and consulted young Mr. Howden upon his business affairs, afterwards calling

for an hour's pleasant chat with his publisher. The latter was an exceedingly jovial, middle-aged man, who possessed the true spirit of the Bohemian, was careful in business, and a personal friend and confidant of most of the popular novelists whose books he issued. Rosmead always enjoyed these chats on 'shop,' for the head of the well-known firm was one of his best friends. Sometimes, in the days before he left London, he would go up to his house in the West End to dine and play billiards, or at others they would lunch together, and transact their business in a manner most amicable and friendly.

Of his domestic affairs Rosmead never spoke. He masked his heavy heart beneath a cloak of easy-going good-humour. Once or twice Lena had accompanied him to dine with the merry publisher and his wife; but she hated all his friends, and only went because he compelled her. The publisher had noticed her careless indolence, her bored attitude, and her *penchant* for spirits, and shrewdly guessed that his friend was not over happy in his home life. This he regretted. Of all his authors he liked Bertram Rosmead best, for his utter lack of egotism, his irresponsible humour, his cosmopolitan air, and his easy-going disposition.

On this occasion he invited him to lunch at the Florence, that well-known Italian restaurant off Wardour Street; but Bertram, fearing that his wife would drink again heavily, was compelled to decline and return to the First Avenue.

Lena was awaiting him. She was sitting in her faded dressing-gown, with a glass of whiskey on the table at her elbow, her face flushed, her eyes red and shifty, her lips full and swollen. A single glance was sufficient to show him that she was drunk.

'You're not ready to go and lunch at the Gaiety, as we arranged,' he observed.

‘Oh, yes, I am,’ she answered, rising. ‘In ten minutes I’ll be dressed. Where have you been? To see all your pals, I suppose. It’s those men you call your friends who are my enemies. It was those men who urged you to take me abroad. And a lot of good it’s done me, hasn’t it?’ she laughed cynically.

He did not reply, but casting himself into her chair, took up a paper and read, while she dressed, with marvellous quickness, considering her state of semi-inebriety.

They took the omnibus from Holborn to the Gaiety, lunched there, but when they descended into the Strand again she suddenly stopped short, saying:

‘I shall go down and see the Parkers this afternoon.’

‘No,’ he answered, for he did not wish her to go to call on this family in the state in which she was. They were people he did not like, for Mrs. Parker was a confirmed inebriate. ‘Let’s go back to the hotel. You are tired, so have a rest while I go out and finish my business.’

‘I shan’t,’ she answered angrily. ‘You always try and keep me from my friends. I shall go.’

‘But I can’t go with you to-day. I have a business appointment. I’ll go to-morrow.’

‘Then I’ll go alone,’ she answered decisively.

‘You won’t,’ he cried firmly. ‘Here’s a cab. Let’s go back to the hotel.’

‘I shan’t go back. You want to keep me in that place all day like a prisoner — you miserable hound! I shall go to the Parkers.’

If she went he knew that she would be helplessly intoxicated that night, as she had been on previous occasions when she had visited that undesirable acquaintance.

‘But you shan’t go,’ he cried, in anger.

‘I shall. And you can go to the devil!’ she said, in a

tone of hatred, and, hailing a passing omnibus, she entered it, and the vehicle moved away, leaving him standing alone upon the pavement.

His face was white with anger ; he bit his lip, then sadly turned away, with heavy, despondent heart, and tears in his serious eyes.

He walked on for nearly two hours, consumed by grief, and utterly heedless of where he went. It was an unusually bright afternoon for London, and the sun shone quite warmly, as, about four o'clock, he passed along Holborn, and found himself again before his hotel. He entered, went to the smoke-room, and sat for a long time in reflection. He had tried every expedient, and had failed. They were homeless, and Lena was now preventing him earning the money necessary for them to live. All his efforts had been futile, and nothing now remained. Calmly he reviewed his position. From every standpoint he saw that, if he remained with her, he must necessarily abandon all thought of a brilliant future. To leave her was the only course. He was sick at heart, and world-weary. Every newspaper gave him laudatory notices, and chronicled his movements as regularly as though he were a royal personage ; applications were pouring in for his autograph, and for his support to charitable institutions, and magazine-editors were eager for his short stories and his serials, although Mr. Howden had now trebled his prices. Yet he was a lonely, melancholy man, without interest in the world around him, without care of what the public thought, or of what praise the Press bestowed upon his work. He was heedless of all his triumphs, for at best they were but empty ones ; he was careless of everything, crushed, broken-hearted.

With a sigh he roused himself at length, crossed to one of the writing-tables, and, in desperation, wrote Lena a sad and bitter letter, telling her of his resolve.

'To live together longer is impossible,' he wrote. 'I regret deeply this step, which I feel, for my own sake, compelled to take, but there is no help for it. I have striven, but all to no purpose. When you receive this I shall have left London, and it will be useless for you to endeavour to find me. All I pray is that you may lead a better life, and that you may break yourself of the terrible habit. You have driven me from you, but I do not upbraid you. I am only filled with heart-felt regret.'

Then he went on to tell her of the monthly allowance he intended to make her, to suggest that she should take comfortable rooms, and, when he had finished, he enclosed her a cheque for twenty pounds for her current expenses.

He closed the letter, sealed it, and addressed it to her.

Then, ascending to his room, he packed one small trunk with his own clothes, and, taking her portrait, which was locked in one of her trunks, placed it in his own, after gazing upon it long and earnestly. When he had finished, he paused.

He sighed, and the hot tears welled in his dark eyes. His lips moved, but no sound came from them.

With sudden resolve, he rang the bell, paid the hotel bill, and, leaving the letter for Lena upon the dressing-table, left the hotel.

At half-past eight that night, the Continental express from Liverpool Street for Antwerp, *viâ* Harwich, bore Bertram Rosmead, the popular romance-writer, the sad and sorrowing man whose fame was world-wide, away into self-imposed exile, and when, two hours later, the steamer cast off from Parkeston Quay, he stood at the stern of the vessel, watching the great electric lights slowly fading in the distance as the ship sped forth into the dark and dismal sea.

'The last of England,' he murmured. 'Henceforth I am an outcast, because I have abandoned her, because I

have taken this step in order to save myself. God knows how I have suffered, and He alone can help me.'

And he stood in silence, his eyes fixed on the far-off lights which shone like stars, while the long waves rose with a swish at the vessel's side, and hissed past as the steamer, with increasing speed, headed her way towards the fishing-grounds.

He gazed about him. All was dark, silent, and lonely, typical, indeed, of his own sad and wearied heart.

CHAPTER XXIII

LIFE'S FLOTSAM

ONCE more Bertram Rosmead became a wanderer. His old Bohemian instinct was aroused within him. Alone, friendless, careless of himself, heedless of everything, he drifted on from town to town, writing spasmodically, but conscientiously fulfilling the contracts Mr. Howden had made for him long ago. From Brussels he went to Namur, and up the winding Meuse, the banks of which were fresh in their spring green, then, when tired of quaint old Dinant, with its high rocks and church with bulgy spire, he went on to Rochefort, Han., and subsequently to that little mediæval out-of-the-world Ardennes village, of late so much patronised by the English, Laroche. For several months he lived there, striving to forget by working hard. The unpretending hotel in which he lived, although on somewhat primitive lines, was nevertheless a cheerful place, filled as it was by English and Belgians, who came there in search of health and pleasure. At last, however, he grew tired of it, and journeyed up the Rhine to Wiesbaden, putting up at the 'Rose,' writing in the morning, and taking his afternoon coffee in the Kursaal garden, smoking and listening to the magnificent band.

He remained until the season waned, then went up to Davos, and subsequently found himself, at Christmas, on the Riviera again, in a *pension* on the Promenade de Garavan at Mentone, where he remained until March. Thus

nearly a year went by. He seldom received a letter from Lena, yet each month she received regularly the allowance he made her, and on her birthday he thoughtfully sent her a present, which, however, she did not deign to acknowledge.

Although he lived at the pleasantest and most frequented health resorts, his exile grew monotonous, and day by day he longed to be back again in England, to live in the country, and enjoy a restful quiet. But this was impossible. If he returned and took a house or apartment in England, Lena would, he knew, come back to him and cast a shadow over his life. Therefore he remained abroad, notwithstanding the earnest solicitations of his friends to return.

At the *table d'hôte* one day, the conversation turned, as it so often does in hotels and *pensions*, upon the most desirable places for summer residence, when one old gentleman declared that one of the most pleasant of Italian towns was Lucca. The novelist turned to him and made some further inquiries. He intended to move ere long, and had no idea where to go, but his fellow-guest's description of that quiet old-world Tuscan town commended it to him as a likely place where he could obtain fresh scenery for a new book.

‘Go and try it,’ the old gentleman said. ‘If you don't like it, go up to the Bagni di Lucca, fifteen miles away, up in the Apennines, a charming place, and almost unknown to the English. You can stay there all the summer without feeling the heat too great. I was there all last summer, and it did my gout a lot of good.’ And he grunted in satisfaction, as old men will.

Rosmead, during the succeeding days, thought well over those words of his fellow-guest, and at length, in the early days of April, set forth, travelling through Genoa to Pisa,

and thence up to Lucca, that quaint old town of Dante and Gentucca, which looked strangely tranquil in the evening light as he drove through its quiet mediæval streets to the 'Universo.' Next day, when he strolled through the narrow, winding streets, with their great old prison-like houses with barred windows, visiting the ancient cathedral of San Martino, with Guidetto's beautiful façade, the Baptistery of San Giovanni, lounged and smoked beneath the plane trees in the sun-whitened Piazza Grande, and took a delightful walk along the ramparts, he became enamoured of the place. It was certainly a quiet, old-world spot, just the place he had long sought, a place with shady piazzas and ancient streets, the very restfulness of which seemed conducive to his work.

Therefore, after a little difficulty, he found apartments, high up in an old palace, overlooking the broad, leafy Piazza del Giglio, where the light-hearted, easy-going people lounge at sunset, listening to the military band, and the gorgeously-attired beadle stands upon the steps of the communal theatre opposite, a wonderfully pompous, but entirely useless personage, as he leans upon his silver-headed staff of office.

Very quickly the novelist settled down to work upon a new romance of Italian life. His sitting-room, a once handsome apartment with beautifully painted ceiling, now sadly faded and crumbling, spoke mutely of the grandeur of that fine old palace in the bygone days when Lucca was the proud capital of the duchy. Through centuries it had been the residence of the powerful Dinucci family, but now, alas! had fallen from its high estate, being divided into tenements, while the last remaining descendant of the Princes Dinucci was believed to be a waiter in a London restaurant. It is ever thus in those Tuscan cities of the past, and sad it is to gaze upon the massive, but mouldering

homes of these great families, whose descendants are now seeking their fortunes outside Italy, or who are living obscurely in semi-poverty in Milan, in Florence, in Rome, or other great cities. Tuscany, the garden of Italy, is full of broken monuments of its glorious past — full of mediæval associations, and rich in antiquities which mutely tell their own sad story.

From the garish hotels and *pensions* of the German *Bads*, the Rhine, and the Riviera, this quaint, restful old place was a pleasant change, and Bertram found that he could write rapidly and well, although at midday the hot, glaring, Italian sunshine compelled him to close his sun-shutters, and work in semi-darkness. But when the shadows lengthened in the quiet hour before dinner, and the infantry band assembled to play selections from the favourite operas, then he would open his long windows and sit watching the merry-faced, sun-tanned Lucchesi as they strolled beneath the chestnuts, enjoying the *bel fresco*, gossiping, laughing, and flirting, after the blazing heat of the day. It was, indeed, a pleasant town, and he was perfectly content there, working by day and idling in one or other of the cafés of an evening; now and then visiting the Giglio Theatre, where he could obtain a good seat and hear the best operas for the not altogether ruinous sum of tenpence. The cost of a box on the best tier was only six lire, or under five shillings, and the performances were always by the most popular companies in Italy. In the home of opera the guinea stall is unknown. One does not assume a claw-hammer coat in the *poltrone*, and one is permitted there to skin and eat *semi*, those salted melon pips so dear to the Tuscan palate. The Italians find it possible to enjoy opera without a starched shirt, and they are keener critics of music than the well-dressed crowd who witness a similar performance at Drury Lane or Covent Garden.

One breathless August day, when the roads lay blanched beneath the burning sun, and the cicale, that harbinger of heat, chirped musically in the trees in the Piazza, he set forth by the little steam tram for an excursion into the Apennines, to obtain fresh air. He carried with him a good-sized kit-bag, which contained pens, ink, and the manuscript upon which he was at work, for he intended to remain up at the Bagni di Lucca for a fortnight or so. The journey there was delightful, first by the little tramway for about five miles — to the Ponte a Moriano, a few straggling houses opposite the high-up village of Moriano — and thence by carriage for ten miles along the shallow, rippling Serchio, traversing a delightful hill country, picturesque, and rich in olives, vines, and maize, passing the strange mediæval Ponte del Diavolo — that pointed bridge which legend declares was built by the Devil seven centuries ago — and through the little village of Fornoli, to the three villages, connecting, which form the once-famed baths. A queer, sleepy place it is, situate in one of the most out-of-the-way corners of Europe, far away from the rail, and in the centre of a wild and beautiful country. There are one or two good hotels, and the plane trees planted in the quiet streets form shady avenues. On every side the mountains are rugged and picturesque, and in every direction are beautiful walks and drives. A century ago, before the advent of railways, this now-forgotten little place was the favourite resort of crowned heads and the aristocracy of Europe; but it has sadly fallen out of fashion nowadays, and like Monte Catini and Vallombrosa, is essentially frequented by better-class Italians, who come up from Florence, Bologna, Pisa, or Leghorn, to escape the intolerable heat of July and August on the plains. The English traveller in Italy never goes to the baths of Lucca, because they are no longer in fashion, and perhaps because they are so inac-

cessible. Nevertheless, a sojourn there is a restful holiday, amid invigorating mountain air and scenery, which reminds one of Central Norway, quiet and peaceful, the rural silence only broken by the murmuring of the Lima river as it rushes along its narrow, rocky bed, and the sighing of the wind in the chestnuts. In a room in the Hotel Victoria, overlooking the spacious garden and the valley, Rosmead installed himself, placed a table in the window, and continued his novel, finding the fresh, cool air refreshing after the blazing heat of the ancient Tuscan town wherein he had settled. At the *table d'hôte* was a crowd of happy Italians, he being the only Englishman in the hotel. In those hours when ideas did not flow freely, he took his stout stick and went forth to explore the neighbourhood, walking great distances and climbing to all sorts of remote mountain villages, those queer little places perched so high up and in such inaccessible spots in the mountains that it seemed almost incredible that anyone should live there. But at night, after dinner, he would settle down with his lamp and write for hours, sometimes, indeed, until a streak of grey light shone over the mountain top and crept in through the crevices of the blind to warn him that another day was dawning.

Although self-exiled, he saw from his letters, and from the Press cuttings sent him by the agency to which he subscribed, how gradually his reputation was increasing. One letter forwarded from Lucca was, indeed, perhaps the most gratifying any professional man could receive. It was from a well-known firm of London photographers, and read as follows:—

‘We should esteem it a favour if you could make it convenient to give us a sitting, as we are anxious to include your portrait in our Gallery of Celebrities. If you will give us an appointment we shall be very happy to

keep it; and of course no portrait will be issued before the proof is approved of by yourself.'

He placed the letter upon the table and sighed. He had reached the height of his ambition, and had become a 'celebrity,' yet he was prevented from enjoying the fame, to achieve which he had toiled until he had become prematurely old and world-weary before his time. His was indeed an empty harvest.

That same day at sunset he walked down the little village to the tiny Piazza del Ponte, and took a seat outside the small café to rest and think. From where he sat he had a good view of the old stone bridge and the white, dusty high road winding away down the valley back to Lucca, the road over which the battered old diligence with its four horses and jingling bells rumbled once every day, and where all the health-seekers drove in high-wheeled carriages from the Ponte a Moriano. Absorbed in his own thoughts, he smoked, sipped his glass of *menta*, and watched the people passing and repassing, the brightly-dressed *contadinelli* bringing fruit, vegetables, and eggs into the little place, and the visitors whose toilettes were not remarkable for either novelty or style, for no lady takes her gayest dresses to the Baths. It is essentially a place where one can lounge in old clothes, and can forget to dress for dinner without impropriety. Thus it entirely suited Bertram's careless tastes.

Suddenly, as he sat with his elbows resting upon the table, his 'Tribuna' cast aside, and his cigarette still in his mouth, his eyes caught sight of a solitary figure, that of a woman with a pearl-grey sunshade crossing the bridge towards him. In an instant the grace of carriage seemed familiar, and, rising to his feet, open-mouthed, he stood gazing intently at the unconscious foot-passenger.

A moment later he had convinced himself.

It was Fosca !

He rushed across to her with a cry of welcome, his hand outstretched, while she on her part drew back in surprise, then took his proffered hand, murmuring some incoherent words, so overjoyed was she.

‘How strange !’ he observed as they walked on side by side. ‘How extraordinary that we should meet here when I thought you far away in America !’

‘We returned three months ago,’ she answered brightly, her dark eyes resting on his with a look of supreme happiness. ‘But why are you here in this unknown place ?’

‘I’ve left London.’

‘For a holiday ?’

‘No,’ he answered in a low tone. ‘For ever.’

She was silent ; her eyes, with the love-light in them, turned upon him as they crossed the tiny Piazza and continued up the avenue towards the Bagni Caldi.

‘And your wife, Bertram ?’ she asked in a tremulous, serious tone. ‘I know that you are married, although you did not tell me so. What of her ?’

‘We have parted,’ he answered, in a voice of melancholy, wondering who had told her of his marriage.

‘She remains in London, I suppose.’

He nodded.

• ‘And how long is it since you left her ?’ she asked with a touch of sympathy.

‘Over a year. I’ve not been in England since, and I have no desire to go.’

‘Then you do not love her ?’ she asked.

He sighed deeply without replying.

She did not follow the painful subject further, but commenced chatting of their tour in America, and of the phenomenal success of ‘Il Parpaglione’ in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, and the other great cities.

‘I saw lots of your books in America,’ she added. ‘There were portraits of you in the papers, and all sorts of laudatory notices of your last novel. You really ought to go over there, for you’d be *fêted*, and have a thoroughly good time of it.’

‘Perhaps I shall go some day,’ he answered. ‘At present I have no desire to leave Tuscany. All is so beautiful here.’

He was telling her, in reply to her questions, how he had been living down in Lucca, and of his travels since leaving London, when suddenly she turned into a gateway, with a lodge, through a great, well-kept garden, bright with oleanders, leading to a handsome villa, a house he had often passed and admired.

‘Are you going to make a call?’ he inquired, hesitating.

‘No. I’m going home. We live here. You must come in, and dine with us. Father will be delighted.’

‘And this is your house?’ he exclaimed in surprise.

‘Yes, father bought it before we went to America out of the profits of the “Parpaglione” in London. He finds it a quiet place where he can work undisturbed, and we are very happy here.’ And as they walked together along the winding approach to the great white house, with its fine marble terrace, and green sun-shutters, he saw that it was without doubt the best residence in the vicinity. Curious it was that times without number he had looked at that place without any suspicion that the love of his youth lived there, the woman whose mysterious action had once, long ago, entirely changed his life.

He found her little altered. She was the same well-dressed, *chic*, yet unaffected woman as she had been when in London, and as they sat together in the cool, elegant *salon*, the windows of which opened upon the terrace,

commanding a wide view of the valley, there came upon him a renewed desire for life. The Marquis was out, therefore they sat alone. She had her hat still on, her gloves cast aside, and leaning back in the little low lounge-chair, she talked to him with all that vivacity which had so long ago charmed him.

She quickly, however, recognised from his carelessness of manner, how dull and aimless was his life, and wondered why he had left the woman he had married, and had exchanged life in London for that lonely exile in which he now existed. She knew but little of the bitterness by which his past had been fraught, or of the emptiness of the fame which had tardily come to him. He had told her nothing.

As he sat with her talking, while the great Apennines grew purple in the haze of the dying day, and the distant bells were tolling for the Ave Maria, one thought alone possessed him, that he must leave there. To remain would jeopardise them both. They loved each other too well.

When they had been chatting for half-an-hour the novelist rose, declaring that he must go back to the hotel for dinner.

‘But why not stay and dine with us?’ she asked quickly.

‘I have a manuscript to dispatch by to-night’s post,’ he answered with quick excuse. ‘A short story for one of the magazines.’

‘Let it wait until to-morrow,’ she urged. ‘Father will be in before half-past six. Do stay!’

‘No,’ he answered gravely, putting forth his hand to wish her good-bye.

‘But you will come to-morrow, Bertram?’ she asked, surprised at his apparent coldness.

‘I cannot promise,’ he answered in a hoarse voice, full of agitation. ‘I may leave the Baths to-morrow.’

‘Why?’ she inquired, in disappointment.

He hesitated for a few seconds, his dark eyes fixed upon her.

‘Because I have a wife,’ he answered. ‘It is therefore best that we should not meet.’

‘Your wife!’ she said, white-faced, as she rose determinedly, and stood before him. ‘Yes, it is true, Bertram; your wife stands between us. True, alas! that happiness cannot be ours.’

He bowed his head. He put forth his hand in farewell, and tried to speak, but could not. For a few moments their hands clasped, and in silence more eloquent than words they looked into each other’s eyes. Then he forced himself from her and went blindly out, while she sank back into her chair and wept bitterly.

She saw that even now, lonely and exiled as he was, overburdened by a weight of sorrow, crushed and disappointed, he was nevertheless full of manly courage and a fierce determination not to deviate from what was right and just towards the woman who was his wife. And her love for him grew more intense, until it became a mad, ungovernable passion.

CHAPTER XXIV

A REVELATION

NEXT morning Bertram Rosmead drove back over the long, dusty, but picturesque road, which wound through the valleys to the Ponte a Moriano, and thence took the little steam tram through the vineyards and plantations of olives to grey old Lucca.

That evening he again sat in his great, gloomy room overlooking the Piazza, plunged deep in thought. From beneath his window there came up the murmur of the crowd who had assembled to listen to the band, which at intervals played selections from the 'Parpaglione' and other popular operas. But in his state of mind the music jarred upon him, and rising, he closed his windows to shut out the sound. Then again he cast himself into his chair and thought. He had put on his old velveteen writing coat, and sat down at his table to write her a letter, but he could not decide what to say; therefore he flung down his pen and abandoned the idea.

Upon him there crowded recollections of the previous afternoon, of how beautiful Fosca was, of her tender sympathy for him. He had noticed, too, on a table near where he sat, one of his photographs in a silver frame, and wondered how she had obtained it. Its presence in her room showed that she did not desire to forget. He remembered those old bygone days in Paris, those days when they walked together in the Bois, or wandered out into the

country to breathe the fresh air and pluck the flowers with glee as great as though they were children. In those days they lived only for one another, supremely content in each other's love. Even now, their love had not diminished by one iota, yet there was a barrier between them which shut them out from that rapturous happiness which might otherwise be theirs. He loved her with a passion he had striven in vain to stifle, and it had cost him every effort of which he was capable to tear himself from her. It was only thoughts of Lena that had given him this strength. None should say that he had ever forgotten his duty towards her.

Until the twilight faded he sat plunged in these bitter memories of the dead past. He had been careless and content in that quiet old place, until he had met the woman he loved. Now he was contemplating leaving Lucca to go forth wandering again. In that hour all his wretchedness came back to him, his desperate struggle for fame; his foolish, romantic marriage, and its bitterness; his efforts to reform Lena; and his subsequent weary travels, alone and outcast, unable to enjoy the fruit of his labours, and with all happiness debarred him. Truly, he had been the sport of Fate!

How hard it was, how stubborn were his thoughts. What had happened to all those old and quixotic dreams; those impossible castles in the air; those great ideals? He shut his eyes, and closed his ears to all sounds. He groped vaguely into the past, his brain fumbled among the forgotten things of forgotten days. Suddenly the lost chord of his memory was stirred, and he recollected his struggles in journalism and his many vague, crude ideas and theories and thirty shillings a week. Well, he was happy then, before Lena fastened herself upon him. Those pet theories and vague, beautiful ideas and thirty shillings a week made life bearable, even in dreary Hounslow. But

things had changed. The face of the world had entirely changed — for him.

When the servant came to tell him that dinner was ready, he roused himself and passed into the small dining-room adjoining, where a single cover was laid. It was a lonely meal, and he ate but little, merely a cutlet, washed down with a couple of glasses of good Chianti from the great rush-covered flask in its silver stand. Then he passed back into his sitting-room, gloomy with its candles in their ancient sconces, the great old apartment dark and unlit save in the vicinity of his littered writing-table.

With a sigh he sank there, turned up his cuffs, — a habit he had acquired when on the *Evening Telegraph*, — and, taking up his pen, commenced writing. In his work he forgot everything. To drown his sorrows he wrote hard, as some drink when they would obliterate the past. His characters lived within him as real persons, and their lives and actions absorbed him when his pen was flying across sheet after sheet of that ruled paper with its wide margin, recording the lives of those creations of his brain. It was a short story he was writing for the Christmas number of an American magazine, a strange, weird romance of love, hatred, and lust of the flesh, and he wrote on and on until the theatre closed and the Piazza became silent, deserted. Then he took a cigarette from the little Japanese box at his elbow and read through the pages of cramped, uneven writing which would go next morning to his typewriter in London, and thence to Mr. Howden, who would dispatch it to New York.

Day followed day without much diversion in his calm and melancholy life. He wrote hard through the sunny hours, and at evening would spend an idle hour beneath the plane trees on the ancient ramparts, where everyone went to get a breath of air after the heat and burden of

the day. He had sent Lena a cheque regularly to an address she had given in Kensington, but for three consecutive months he had received no acknowledgment, and had had no news of her. He often wondered why she had not written, yet he sent her allowance each day it was due, registering the letter to make certain she received it.

He was sitting late one afternoon, writing as usual with his well-worn 'Thesaurus' open at his elbow, and his chin resting on his hand, when the door opened softly and the servant ushered in a lady.

He turned with annoyance upon the intruder, but rose quickly from his chair and bowed when he saw that it was Fosca.

'You are at work, Bertram,' she said in a low voice, taking his hand; 'I hope I haven't disturbed you. Will you forgive me?'

'Forgive you!' he laughed. 'Of course I will,' and he drew forward the easiest of the chairs for her. 'I have few visitors nowadays, so you must forgive the negligent appearance,' he added half-apologetically, remembering that he had removed his collar, and that his hair was ruffled, as it always was when he wrote.

'I am not classed among your visitors, I hope,' she protested smiling. 'We are too old friends for any apologies to be needed. Remember that we never apologised to each other in the dear old Quartier long ago.' She spoke in French, with a slight Italian roll of the 'r's.'

He laughed, as he tossed his pen back upon the table and took a seat near her.

'But we are no longer lovers,' he observed with a sigh, growing grave an instant later.

She was silent. Her lips quivered. She had come to him after much hesitation, yet now she feared to speak lest he should hate her.

‘We cannot be lovers since you have married,’ she said. ‘Yet we may still — nay, we do — love one another.’

She spoke the truth, and he bowed his head in acknowledgment.

‘Yes,’ he answered, slowly, ‘I love you, Fosca. I have never in my life loved any other woman —’

‘Not even your wife?’ she asked, interrupting.

‘No,’ he assured her, speaking in a sad, mournful tone, ‘not even her.’

‘Then why did you marry? Was it for money?’

‘No. She was penniless,’ he answered.

‘Then you must have loved her?’

‘I tell you frankly that I never loved her. I married her because — well, strange as it may seem, I married her because she was unhappy at home and I pitied her.’

‘You have an English proverb which says that pity is akin to love.’

‘In my case there is no truth in such an assertion. Since I have married I have been even filled with disappointment and regret.’

‘Poor Bertram!’ she sighed in sympathy. ‘How many times I have thought of you since those old days in Paris; how many times I have wondered how you fared; how many times have I told myself that of all men I have loved only you?’

‘And you left me,’ he observed bitterly. ‘There was a day, Fosca, when you cast aside my love.’

‘Ah, yes,’ she cried, with a bitter look and an intense expression in her eyes. ‘Would that I could recall that wrong; would that I could explain to you the reason of my strange action in writing that letter which wrecked both my life as well as yours.’

‘All is past now,’ he observed in a calm voice. ‘We are only friends, not lovers. Surely you can tell me the truth?’

‘ I dare not.’

‘ Whom do you fear ?’

‘ No, no,’ she cried, ‘ don’t cross-question me. Do you not think that, if explanation were possible, I, loving you as well as I do, Bertram, would tell you everything? But the story is too strange for you to believe without convincing proof, and the secret too dangerous to disclose, even to you.’

His lips compressed, and a shadow of disappointment crossed his wide, open forehead. He loved her passionately; but this mysterious secret of hers seemed as a barrier between them. While she declined to tell him the reason she had left Paris on that day so long ago he felt dubious as to her true, honest love. On his part, he adored her. At that very moment it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from taking her in his arms and covering her lips with hot, passionate kisses. Yet, in the years that had passed, he had schooled himself to an outward calmness and indifference; he was no longer impetuous, as he had been in the old days of joys without sorrow and of loves without a morrow, but had become a man whose grief had soured him against the world’s pleasures, and whose hermit-like habits had caused him to become morose, cold, impassible.

‘ If you still decline to tell me anything, is it not better that we should remain apart?’ he suggested, with a touch of impatience in his voice, throwing back his head, and looking at her neat figure as she sat there before him.

‘ I have come to you to-day to ask you a question,’ she said, striving to remain calm notwithstanding the tumult of emotions within her. ‘ It is a strange one for a woman to ask a man.’ Then she hesitated. ‘ I have come to ask you, Bertram, if you really entertain the same affection for me as you did in those bygone days; to ask you if I still

have a place within your heart ?' Her voice trembled, and her eyes dropped half in shame at the strangeness of her question.

'Why do you doubt ?' he inquired quickly. 'Surely you see how dull and colourless is my life, how useless to me is all this empty notoriety they call fame; and yet you come here to taunt me! It is cruel of you, Fosca; cruel, because you know that in these wretched circumstances I have no freedom to love. Through these years of my fight for fame, my life has been one of interminable unhappiness. I foolishly thought, as so many other men have thought, that the praise of the public, and universal popularity, would bring me felicity, but I have only found the fruit of my work bitter, and that having obtained that for which I strove so long and earnestly, I have now no heart to enjoy it. See there!' and he pointed to a great pile of Press cuttings, gummed on their well-known green slips, which had arrived from London an hour ago. 'Among those you will find laudatory paragraphs about me, about the excellency of my work, my insight into character, and the beautiful surroundings of this my home. Men less fortunate, those good-hearted fellows, the journalists, among whom I worked through the years of my struggles, reading these paragraphs, envy me because I have escaped the dreary toil of London life. They think I live in sunshine, work only when the humour seizes me, and idle away my hours in the country, your beautiful Tuscany. But if they knew the truth, if they were told that the man they envy was world-weary, broken-hearted, and sick of all these compliments, that his life is dismal and utterly aimless, they would perhaps hesitate to believe it. Few know of my domestic infelicity, and those who do are not the ones to give it undue publicity. When we parted at the Bagni, I had resolved that it should be our last meeting, Fosca,' he

added, in a broken voice, his brow furrowed with sorrow. 'It is best that we should remain apart, because such meetings as these only serve to bring back memories of the past, and to cause us to reflect upon the happy might-have-beens.'

Her breast slowly rose and fell beneath its lace and jet, and he saw a tear glistening upon her veil.

'So you only think of me as an old friend, and not as one who loves you?' she sighed. 'I feared it was so.'

'No, no,' he hastened to assure her, leaning forward quickly, and taking her hand. 'Surely you have never doubted that I love you, Fosca? God knows what it has cost me to remain apart from you.'

His face was pale and hard set; his eyes were fixed upon hers with a look of fierce ardour it was impossible to mistake.

'Once you left me — you cast me aside, and, because of it, I became a wanderer, heedless of everything,' he continued. 'Since that day many things have happened, yet I am now again a wanderer, again alone, again an outcast, again heart-broken.'

'Because you love your wife!' she exclaimed bitterly. 'You love this heartless woman who has done her best to ruin you?'

'I tell you I do not love her,' he cried fiercely. 'I only pity her.'

Fosca's brow darkened behind her veil. She raised her hand to pull the flimsy net tighter beneath her chin, and as she did so the last gleam of sunshine caught her diamond bangle, and caused it to flash with all the colours of the spectrum.

'Why do you pity her?' she asked with some aspersion, which showed him that her jealousy had been aroused.

‘She has no thought of you. She hates you, and she is worthless!’

‘It is for the latter reason that I’ve left her,’ he answered in a mechanical voice.

‘And yet you still think always of her — you nurse your sorrow, and appear to derive a bitter satisfaction from doing so!’ she exclaimed. ‘You, who are popular, who are *fêted* in society, and whose books are read by everybody in England and in America, need not be so dismal and lonely as you are. Try and forget.’

‘I have tried,’ he answered. ‘I have tried to forget you, Fosca, but am unable; I can never forget.’

‘Then you still love me?’ she cried, starting up, falling upon her knees before him, suddenly, and, raising her veil, took both his hands in hers, and covered them with hot, fervent kisses.

‘No, no, Fosca,’ he cried, placing her determinedly from him, and gazing upon her sadly. ‘It is true that I love you with all my soul; that never since those days in Paris has any woman stirred within me the chord of affection. Yes; I answer your question frankly; I adore you. But, alas! that fact does not lighten our burdens, nor does it render our lives the brighter. For me the future is but a sea of grey despair; but for you, young, beautiful, the daughter of a man distinguished and popular, there is life and love and happiness. From to-day let us both forget. No good can result in these meetings, for they only create within us a wistfulness that cannot be satisfied; vague longings for that which we can never attain. Let us bury our love, and forget, Fosca. Leave me to my sorrow, and marry some man worthy of you. Obtain happiness yourself without further regard for me; for there is no need that both our lives should thus be wrecked, or that this heritage of woe should sap your life as well as mine.’

‘But I love you, Bertram,’ she cried, in a passionate, tremulous voice. ‘I cannot forget — I shall never forget, I — I cannot live without your love.’

He sighed heavily, still holding her hands. Her pale face was upturned to his, and the temptation grew upon him to bend and press his lips to hers. But he drew back, lest he should lose control over himself, and said simply:

‘Try to forget.’

‘I cannot. It is impossible,’ she declared wildly. ‘We love each other. It is destiny.’

He bowed his head in acquiescence. The stray ray of the sunset glow, slanting in through the half-open sunshutters, caught her hair, and seemed to surround her head with a golden halo. Never before had she seemed such a perfect incarnation of grace and beauty as there, upon her knees, she bent before him.

‘Yes,’ he said, in a low, sad voice, ‘it is destiny, Fosca, a bitter destiny, that we should thus be held asunder. But what must be, must be.’

For a moment they were hand in hand, heart to heart, soul with soul.

‘If you were free — if, in years to come, events occur so that you obtain your freedom, would you then marry me?’ she asked at last, in an intense but faltering tone, her nervous hands trembling in his.

‘Yes, of course I would,’ he responded quickly. ‘But why do you ask that? What strange fancy possesses you?’

She rose to her feet slowly, and stood before him, her face grave, her eyes downcast.

‘You force me to tell you, Bertram,’ she said, in a strained tone, quite unusual to her — the voice of one in desperation. ‘If I did not love you as passionately as I do, I would, I assure you, never utter to you the words I am

about to utter. You may attribute what I am about to tell you to a fierce, mad jealousy. Well, I admit I am jealous. But it is the truth, a terrible truth, which I will reveal to you if you promise to forgive me for uttering it.'

He looked at her in quick surprise.

'Of course I forgive you. Tell me what it is,' he asked.

For a moment she hesitated, pale and breathless.

'Do you know a man named Vizard — Sir Douglas Vizard?'

'Vizard?' he repeated. 'Yes,' he answered, suddenly recollecting. 'My wife introduced him to me at Monte Carlo. An old man, with grey whiskers.'

She nodded. Then a silence fell between them.

'Well?' he asked at last. 'What of him?'

'Bertram,' she answered gravely, her voice trembling, 'that man is your wife's lover!'

The effect of her words was almost electrical. He started from his chair with clenched fists, his brow furrowed, his mouth agape, his eyes staring at her fixedly; his attitude that of a man who had made a discovery so unexpected and amazing that it held him petrified.

'My wife's lover?' he echoed, when at length he found tongue.

'Yes,' she answered calmly. 'He was that woman's lover before her marriage with you, and he is so still. If you doubt my words it will not be difficult for you to obtain proof. I told you a short time ago that this woman, to whom you are so loyal and true, is worthless. Now I have revealed to you the truth.'

Lena was worthless. Had not Teddy O'Donovan often used that very same expression? He had evidently been aware of the hideous truth, but had hesitated to reveal it. If it were actually true, then he had been a blind, con-

finding fool through these years of toil and sorrow, believing always in his wife's fidelity.

With such tumultuous thoughts surging through his troubled brain, he stood before the woman he so dearly loved, bowed, dumbfounded, spell-bound.

CHAPTER XXV

AT THE GREY HOUSE

ON Sunday morning, a week after Fosca had visited Bertram in Lucca, Teddy O'Donovan entered his studio, tired and rather lazy after a late Saturday night at the Savage. The chairman at the house-dinner had been a popular favourite, and had wielded the savage club to the satisfaction and amusement of everybody; the speeches had sparkled with wit, O'Dell, that merry old Bohemian whose striking figure is so well-known in the vicinity of Adelphi Terrace, had recited one of his oft-repeated pieces by 'his dear departed brother — Savage Edgar Lee,' William Nicol had sung one of his sweetest ballads, Phil May had sketched some of his inimitable caricatures, George Gros-smith had dropped in late and convulsed them with his drolleries, while the tobacco smoke had been exactly of that density so dear to the heart of every 'Savage.' The house-dinner is never voted a success unless the smoke assumes a certain density, and O'Dell is not present to pass his verdict upon the quality of the food.

Teddy's mouth was parched, and his clothes smelt strongly of overnight cigars.

'Late last night,' he muttered to himself as he stood contemplating his unfinished canvas. 'Must have been nearly five before I tumbled in.' Then he laughed merrily to himself as he recollected how, on leaving the club, he, with several other kindred spirits, well-known writers and

painters, had gone at four in the morning to the coffee-stall at the corner of St. Martin's Lane and Charing Cross, and there ate up all the hard-boiled eggs previous to driving home in a procession of hansoms. Like many workers in other spheres of life, Bohemian London toils hard all the week and gives itself a holiday on Saturday night. Teddy cared little for the many society functions to which he was bidden, but he never missed the house-dinner at the Savage.

He contemplated his unfinished canvas for some minutes, then crossed to an old carved-oak cabinet and mixed himself a remedy for his debility in the shape of a brandy and soda. Scarcely, however, had he put down the glass when the door opened.

He turned quickly, and found himself face to face with his old friend Rosmead.

'By Jove, Bertram, old fellow!' he cried gaily, rushing across to meet his visitor. 'You're about the very last man I should have expected. Come in. Come in, my dear old boy. Some fellows at the "Savage" were only last night asking about you. We all thought you were still in Italy.'

'I only left two days ago, and have travelled straight through. I arrived last night,' the novelist answered, tossing aside his soft felt hat, and flinging himself into the nearest arm-chair, with a sigh of weariness.

'You're tired,' the artist said. 'Have a drink,' and crossing to the cabinet, he returned a moment later with a long brandy and soda.

The novelist swallowed it slowly without a word, then placed the empty glass from him. His face was pale, his brow deep furrowed, and his friend did not fail to notice the great change effected in him during the eighteen months of his absence.

'Have you come back to stay?' he asked, as he seated

himself with his hands clasped at the back of his head, a habit of his when in conversation, 'or do you intend leaving us again? Tell me, old fellow, how are things going?'

'As usual,' the novelist responded, in a wearied voice. 'I've not come home to stay. Only to see you.'

'Why?' his friend asked, in some surprise.

'I've come to — to speak to you about Lena. Have you seen her lately?'

'Not very lately,' the other replied, in a low, serious tone. 'I met her in the Strand a month ago. She spoke to me, and asked if I had heard of you.'

'How was she?'

'She seemed much the same as usual, although evidence was not wanting that she had been drinking.'

Bertram sighed, and was silent. He glanced around his friend's comfortable, artistic home, and envied him.

Teddy saw how deeply his friend's sorrow weighed upon him, and changed the subject. They talked of mutual friends, men well known in literature and art, brother 'Vagabonds' and brother 'Savages.' The artist related the latest droll story told across the table on the previous night, but the novelist's laughter had not that same genuine ring as of old. His gaiety was artificial, his amusement feigned. Truth to tell, he was in no mood to hear the witty repartee of the men who had once been his boon companions. When one is absent from London one is soon forgotten, and it was gratifying to think that he was still remembered in the set wherein he had once been a well-known figure. Bertram Rosmead had but few enemies outside the reporting staff of the *Evening Telegraph*, that brilliant little band who were so consumed by jealousy, and the reason of his decision to live on the Continent had long been the subject of much speculation. Not half-a-

dozen people were aware of the truth, or knew that Mr. and Mrs. Rosmead had parted.

The novelist answered his friend's questions mechanically, heeding the conversation little, his mind centred upon the one object of his visit.

'Teddy,' he exclaimed at last, in a deep, earnest voice, looking at the artist with dark, thoughtful eyes. 'I have travelled from Italy here to see you, in order to ask you a question.'

'Well,' asked his friend, surprised.

'Long ago you often said that Lena was worthless, and you urged me to leave her. Why?'

'Because — well, because she was ruining all your prospects, my dear fellow,' the other replied. 'My prophecy was fulfilled. You were compelled at last to part from her. No man on earth could have borne the burden longer.'

'Yes,' he said, gravely. 'But why did you allege that she was worthless? You would never tell me. Surely you can tell me now?'

Teddy hesitated for a moment, his brows knit, for his old friend held him in a tight corner.

'No, my dear old chap,' he answered at last. 'It's best that I should not tell you the reason.'

'You decline?'

'Yes, I decline. You've left her, and that's enough. Why think any more of her when she's forgotten you?'

'My wife has forgotten her duty towards me, and you hesitate to tell me,' he said, his eyes fixed upon those of his friend.

The artist sat immovable, and did not answer.

'I have discovered the truth,' he went on, in a harsh, bitter tone. 'My wife's lover is Sir Douglas Vizard, the

man who speaks at religious meetings and gives addresses to young men. 'Tell me, is that true?' he asked, in a voice that would brook no denial.

'Yes, since you ask, Bertram, that is the truth,' the artist replied, in a pained voice.

'And yet you would not tell me?' Bertram observed, in a tone of reproach.

'I hinted it to you often, but I feared to tell you the truth,' he said. 'Your life was full enough of sorrow.'

'How did you become aware of it?' he asked. 'Tell me all.'

'I knew Vizard,' he said, after a few moments' hesitation. 'A friend introduced us, and one night, some months before your marriage, I accepted his invitation to smoke with him at his chambers in Staple Inn. Before I left a girl came there, took off her hat, drank with us, and, from the manner in which she made herself at home, it was evident that she was no stranger to the place. I took in the situation at a glance, but judge my horror when, some months later, you introduced her to me as your wife.'

Bertram remained in silence a few moments.

'She must have recognised you,' he said. 'That would account for her inexpressible hatred of you. She feared lest you might betray her.'

'A hundred times I have been on the point of telling you the truth,' the artist exclaimed, sympathetically. 'Yet I always hesitated, feeling that your grief was sufficient for you to bear, that you must sooner or later part from her, and that it would be as well for you to remain in ignorance, as knowledge of it could only make your life more full of bitterness.'

'Yes, yes. I see it all now,' the novelist answered. 'I see what a fool I was to disregard your repeated advice. But I hoped that she would reform. I strove my hardest

to break her of her intemperate habits, nearly ruining myself in the futile effort. Now, at last, the truth has been revealed in all its hideousness. Her craving for life in London is explained by her desire to be near the man she loved, and to visit him secretly. She never entertained any affection for me, and only married me in order to obtain a superficial honesty.'

'I told you she was worthless,' O'Donovan exclaimed. 'She deceived you with a cool, deliberate cunning that was amazing. But why trouble over her now? It is all of the past. A woman of her character is not worthy a single moment's serious thought.'

A tap at the door prevented the novelist from replying, and Manton, the maid, entered with a card.

Her master took it, glanced at the name, and then gazed across at his friend open-mouthed.

'Show the lady up,' he replied, then passed the card across to Bertram.

The name upon it was 'Fosca Farini.'

Scarcely had Rosmead expressed his amazement when Fosca, looking fresh and dainty in a neat costume of blue-grey trimmed with cream, girdled narrow but distinctive, entered the room with a *frou-frou* of skirts and laces, and, as both men rose to greet her, she drew back in surprise at confronting the man she loved.

'I thought you were still in Lucca,' she said, as her hand lingered in his for an instant. 'How strange that we should meet again here! How long have you been in London?'

'I arrived last night,' he answered.

'And I also,' she said. 'I travelled home *viâ* Milan and Bâle to Calais. Surely you did not come by the same route?'

'No,' he replied. 'I travelled by Turin, Paris, and

Dieppe. We must both have arrived in London at the same time.'

'Yes,' she said. 'And our errands both have the same object.'

'The same? I don't understand,' answered the man she loved, looking at her with a puzzled expression.

'We have both come to discover the truth; you to obtain proof of your wife's perfidy, I to obtain freedom from a yoke which for years has galled me, and for years has prevented me from telling you the truth.'

'Your secret!' he cried, quickly. 'Do you anticipate freedom from the bond of silence?'

'I do,' she said. 'I have striven, and have still to strive towards that end.'

'The revelation you made of my wife's infidelity has been fully borne out. Teddy has confirmed your words,' the novelist said, in a despondent tone. 'So confident was I of her chastity that I felt inclined to regard your statement as the outcome of a natural jealousy, but from what I have learnt to-day there can be no doubt. That she drank to excess was true, but I have all along looked upon her failing with leniency, because I believed her to be an honest, upright woman. But she is guilty — and I hate her.'

'You love me, Bertram?' Fosca cried in earnestness, grasping his hands and looking into his face. 'You love me?'

'Yes,' he answered, in a hoarse voice. 'It is true, Fosca, I love you.'

'Then, hear me!' she said, her face pale, her slim figure a trifle tragic. 'If you believe in my honesty and in my love for you, come with me.'

'Where?'

'To her.'

‘To my wife!’ he cried. ‘No. To-night I shall leave England again. I have neither desire to see her, nor to drag my name through the mire of the Divorce Court. I know the truth. That is sufficient.’

Her brows contracted for an instant. His words were not reassuring.

‘But for my sake — Bertram — for my sake,’ she implored.

‘You are the woman I love,’ he cried. ‘How can I accompany you?’

‘She has no love for you,’ Fosca declared. ‘You have already told me that she has ceased to write to you long ago. Come with me. I cannot speak unless you are face to face.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked the novelist, surprised. ‘What do you intend doing?’

‘Wait and see,’ she answered. ‘You have long demanded an explanation, and I am now ready to make it, providing that for one brief hour you will conform to my wishes. Teddy will also come.’

‘Why?’ inquired the artist. ‘Such a breach between husband and wife can only be settled in the Divorce Court.’

‘But your presence is also necessary,’ she urged. ‘You must come — you hear, you must.’

‘Is it not best to let the wretched woman alone, now that Bertram has learnt the truth? If he is determined not to divorce her, to visit her will only cause unnecessary pain to everybody concerned.’

‘I tell you that you must both come with me. I have travelled here from Italy with that purpose. In Lucca I learnt that Bertram had left for London, and I followed only a couple of hours after he had left. Bertram must come with me. No matter how it pains him, he must

have one last interview with this woman; and you, his best friend, may certainly be present. Do not hesitate, but come. Let us go at once.'

'Where?'

'To Sir Douglas's chambers, in Staple Inn. She lives there.'

'Lives there!' echoed the novelist, in a hard voice. 'And I have been supporting her all this time! The money I have been sending her has been spent by this man, who has, no doubt, laughed at my blissful ignorance.'

'Don't let us lose time,' Fosca cried anxiously. 'See,' she added, pointing to the clock, 'it is already midday. Let us go.'

There was a dead silence. Both men were impressed by her strange earnestness of manner, and neither offered further excuse. Teddy changed his coat, and, during his absence, Bertram pressed the hand of his well-beloved.

'When I have convinced you of the truth,' she said, in a low voice of determination, looking up into his face, 'you will see how terribly I have suffered, how my secret has held me in a grip of terror, and why we were so suddenly placed asunder. You still believe that once, long ago, I ruthlessly cast aside all thought of you, and abandoned you, because you were poor. Well, when you have heard me, you shall be my judge.'

'Have you at last resolved to disclose that secret you have for so long carefully guarded?' he asked, with a quick, renewed interest.

'Be patient, and see,' she answered, in a tone of confidence. 'If I do, my words will astound you. The truth is incredible. The facts almost stagger belief.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TRUTH

HALF-AN-HOUR later all three alighted from a closed cab in Holborn, opposite that narrow court which gives entrance to Staple Inn, and together they ascended the dark, well-worn stairway to the door which bore Sir Douglas Vizard's name.

Fosca and Bertram drew back, and, in answer to the knock, there was a shuffling of feet, the clanking of a chain, and, a moment later, the stout old baronet himself opened the door, and, recognising Teddy, asked him in.

He was in his shirt-sleeves, dirty, unshaven, and wore list slippers. His scanty hair was ruffled, and it was evident that he had only just risen. As the artist stepped inside his two companions followed him quickly into the tiny hall, much to the amazement of the baronet, who saw instantly how neatly he had been tricked.

'What's the meaning of this?' he inquired, turning quickly to them.

'My wife is here,' cried the novelist. 'I have come to search for her.'

The old man laughed a coarse, forced laugh as Bertram brushed past him, and, entering the sitting-room, confronted Lena, standing near the window, erect, and pale to the lips.

Her hair was towseled; she wore an old flannel dressing-gown, which had once been pale blue, but had now assumed a shade of dirty grey; her face was unwashed, her feet

thrust into shoes several sizes too large for her. She stood confused and speechless before her husband, her eyes were fixed upon the threadbare carpet. The place smelt close, stuffy, and nauseating.

As Fosca entered with the artist she glanced furtively at them; then her teeth set themselves in fierce desperation, and a shudder ran through her. Her clenched hands trembled as though palsied; her face assumed an ashen hue. She was quite sober, and, perhaps for the first time in her life, was conscious of her shame.

‘Well, sir,’ cried Bertram, furiously turning to the shambling old Pharisee, ‘and what explanation, pray, have you to offer?’

‘Ask your wife,’ he answered, with a sarcastic grin. ‘She’ll no doubt tell you the truth, as she always has done.’

The novelist turned to the wretched, trembling woman, but, in an instant, in a sudden outburst of hysterical penitence, she flung herself upon her knees before him, crying:

‘Ah, no! Bertram. Forgive me! Forgive!’

She tried to clutch his hands, but he drew back from her contact in loathing.

‘Say that you will forgive me, Bertram,’ she implored in a wild voice. ‘I have been a weak, wretched woman, I know. To you I’ve been a burden always. But forgive. See! here, on my knees before them all, I crave one word of pardon; I ask you to ——’

‘Hear me before you reply,’ cried Fosca, advancing with outstretched hand, and with a look of scorn upon the penitent woman bowed upon her knees at her husband’s feet. Then, turning to the artist, she said: ‘First, lock that door. What is said in this room must not go beyond it.’

The artist put his hand upon the key, turned it, and quickly placed it in his pocket, in accordance with instructions she had given him on their way thither. Seeing this,

the baronet's attitude underwent a change. The supercilious smile upon his gross, bloated face gave place to a look of mingled surprise and alarm. So sudden had been this intrusion that he had had no time to prepare a defence.

‘I object to be thus locked in my own room,’ he cried resentfully. ‘Kindly open that door again.’

‘Not yet,’ Teddy answered firmly. ‘When we have finished, you and your companion shall be released. Until then, compose yourself.’

‘Listen,’ said Fosca, addressing the man she loved. ‘Before pardoning this woman, who has sinned before man and God, reflect upon the statement I am now about to make — a statement which is true, and every fact of which I will afterwards verify.’

Lena, struggling unevenly to her feet, staggered to her chair, and gripped it for support, her face blanched and haggard, her wild eyes with dark rings around them, and a strange expression of abject terror in their depths.

‘Lies!’ she gasped. ‘This woman is known as a vile adventuress. Do not believe her, Bertram! She loves you, and is prompted by jealousy.’

‘You fear the truth,’ Fosca cried, with flashing eyes. ‘But you have done your best to deceive and ruin a man of whom you were unworthy, and I will not spare you.’

‘I do not fear you,’ Lena answered defiantly. ‘Speak. Utter what foul libels you like. They cannot hurt me.’

‘First,’ Fosca said, turning to the grey-faced old baronet, who stood near his companion, fidgeting with ill-disguised alarm. ‘That man there is an evil blackmailer, beneath whose thrall I have remained all these years, and under whose influence I would have fallen had I not fought against him.’

‘You’re a liar!’ he cried fiercely.

‘Then listen, while I explain,’ she said, turning to the

artist. 'In order to view the facts aright, carry your recollection back to those days in Paris when you, Teddy, loved Violette, and when Bertram and I were lovers. In those summer days when, stifled at my lace-counter at the Louvre, I was glad of any pretext to escape, a man came one day and asked for some lace to be sent on approval to a lady who was ill at the Hôtel Continental, requesting that I might be sent with it. I went that afternoon, taking with me some expensive pieces of old Venetian, but found that the man's story of a lady being ill was a fabricated one, and that he had done this because he wished for an opportunity to talk with me. He admired me, he said, ordered some tea for me, chatted, bought a length of lace, and I went away, after promising to meet him again on the following Sunday. Perhaps it was because he flattered me that I flirted with him. I told him of my student-lover, and he laughed, amused that I should thus deceive him.' Turning to the novelist, she said, 'You will remember that for two or three Sundays in succession we did not meet. I made excuses that my mother was ill, and it was my duty to visit her.'

'Yes,' he said, in a deep voice, 'I well remember. Who was this man that came between us?'

'The man before you — Sir Douglas Vizard,' Fosca answered, without hesitation. 'He said he loved me, but I nevertheless still loved you. We met often, and he gave me some pretty presents, which I, of course, concealed from you; I was deceiving you, yet never for a moment did my affection waver — that I swear. Why I did this I cannot tell. I was young then, and by the man's title I thought him rich and distinguished. I did not then know that he was a penniless adventurer, who picked up a precarious livelihood by selling his name to the directors of shady companies. In those days I knew nothing of such things,

believing an English baronet to be a man of honour. Well, we met several times in the Tuileries Gardens, and beneath the trees on the Quai d'Orsay, and each time he tried to induce me to relinquish all thought of you. One day in summer, however, he came into the Louvre on pretence of buying lace, and made an appointment to meet me that evening in the little garden in the Rue du Cloître, behind Notre Dame.'

'The place where Violette was murdered!' exclaimed Teddy, all the vivid details of that mysterious crime surging across his brain. 'And you met him there?'

'Yes,' she answered. 'He had told me where to meet him, at a seat beneath the wall of the cathedral, and when I entered the garden and approached it, I saw a woman sitting there. It was the woman you knew as Violette.'

'Violette!' the artist gasped. 'You saw her?'

'Yes. I was about to pass by, but something in her attitude struck me as curious. She was in pain, holding both hands to her breast, and I saw the stain of blood. Upon the ground, at my feet, lay a revolver. I picked it up, then rushed towards her to lend her aid. No one was present, and at that moment the thought flashed upon me that she had attempted suicide. Ere I had approached her, however, this man now before you appeared, glanced quickly from her to me, and seeing me with the revolver in my hand, grasped me and denounced me as a murderess. So taken aback was I by this astounding accusation that at first I made no attempt to deny it. Such a charge seemed too absurd; but a few moments later he urged me to escape, half-dragging me towards the gate, and leaving Violette in her dying agony. I still had the revolver in my hand, and in obedience to his command, scarce knowing what I did, I concealed it in my dress pocket, and we both crossed the Port d'Arcole and gained the Rue de Rivoli. "Go back

to the Louvre," he said; "say nothing to anybody, and your guilt can never be proved." This I did, and read in the next morning's papers of the mysterious assassination. Some three days later he again called, and in the evening I met him. My first words were in explanation of the circumstances in which he found me, but his attitude had changed. Instead of being solicitous after my welfare, he declared his intention of giving information against me, allowing me one alternative — to leave for England with him. If I would consent to that, he would preserve silence. If not, the revolver concealed in my bedroom at the Louvre was, in itself, sufficient evidence to send me to the guillotine.'

'The scoundrel!' cried O'Donovan, with his strong Irish accent. 'And it was he himself who committed the murder!'

'I hated him,' Fosca went on, turning to the man she loved, 'but I had fallen into the trap he had so cunningly prepared for me. A word from him would give me into the hands of the police, therefore, after reflection, I resolved to act with discretion. That he held me in his power, irrevocably, was only too plain. If I had told you the truth, Bertram, you would not have believed me; therefore, after several weeks of indecision, I wrote to you that letter — making it appear that I preferred Jean Potin — and left Paris secretly on that memorable day, going to a distant relation at Avignon, where I obtained a post as cashier in a *magasin*.'

'Is this actually the truth?' cried the novelist, open-mouthed, at her strange story.

'No, it's a lie,' answered the gross-faced man.

'It's the truth, every word of it,' Fosca declared in a firm voice. 'For years I lived in daily dread of this man, from whose vile influence I had only managed to escape by

the exercise of the greatest cunning; but at last he found me when, on my father's success, I rejoined him in Paris. He had then altered his tactics, compelled me to buy his silence, and from time to time he has extracted from me sums of money under threats of exposure.'

'A low blackmailer!' exclaimed Bertram.

'Yes. For nearly two years he continued to seek me, in Rome, in Vienna, in London, and I continued to pay him, dreading lest the circumstantial evidence might be sufficient to convict me of the crime. But, at last, one day in London he told me of your marriage, and made it his proud boast that he was your wife's lover. The knowledge that you were lost to me made me utterly careless of my future, and I then refused to further comply with his demands, defying him. In response, he made all sorts of terrible threats, but from that day until this we have not met.'

'Then this man is the actual murderer of Violette?' O'Donovan cried, with a glance of hatred towards the shuffling old man, who stood humiliated, with face livid.

'Listen,' she continued; 'listen, and I will give you further explanation. Until a week ago, I believed that such was the case, and that the only person who could solve the mystery, which had so puzzled all Paris, was myself. The truth, however, has just been revealed, and therefore I do not fear this man's threats, nor am I compelled to preserve my secret longer.'

'The truth!' both men cried. 'What is it? Is not this man the assassin?'

'You will recollect that in my letter to you,' she said, addressing Bertram, 'I declared that Jean Potin was my lover. Jean heard of that from some of his friends in the Quartier after he had left, therefore kept a silence that has prevented the truth becoming known. Strangely enough,

however, Jean, who, as you know, is now a member of the Chamber of Deputies, was in Italy, and called on me at Lucca, where he explained to me the whole truth, and, after I had told him how this man had blackmailed me, declared that he is now ready to give evidence in support of his statement. He crossed the garden on that evening, as a near cut, having entered by the gate opposite the Morgue, and emerged by the one in the Rue du Cloître. He saw the murder committed !’

‘Saw it committed ! Then he was an actual witness ?’ cried Teddy. ‘Why did he not give information at the time ?’

‘Because he also saw me in the vicinity, and believed that the murder was the result of a quarrel in which I was implicated. He says that he suspected me of being an accessory, and therefore feared to speak.’

‘But who killed Violette ?’ demanded the artist, excitedly.

Fosca hesitated a moment, then in a clear, distinct voice, answered —

‘The culprit is that woman before you, Lena Rosmead !’

Bertram’s wife uttered a low scream, staggered unevenly, reeled, and would have fallen had not her companion seized her arm. Her face was ghastly white ; her eyes glared with unutterable terror at the woman who had thus denounced her, and her cold, nervous hands trembled as she clutched the edge of the table, and stood swaying against it.

These words caused both men to utter exclamations of blank surprise and dismay.

‘Lena !’ cried the novelist, in a dubious tone. ‘But she has never been in Paris.’

‘Oh ! yes, she has !’ replied Fosca. ‘Since the tragedy,

Jean, the single witness, has succeeded in unearthing the identity of Violette.'

'Who was she?' inquired Teddy, quickly.

'This man's step-daughter!'

'His step-daughter!' they cried incredibly.

'It appears that this scoundrel married a widow, Violette's mother; a Frenchwoman of large fortune. The lady soon afterwards died, leaving all her money to her daughter, who at once left her step-father in London, and went back to live in Paris, taking as her maid this wretched woman, Lena. Vizard apparently conceived the idea of encompassing his step-daughter's death, and so obtaining her fortune. He must have conspired with the maid, for it is a fact now beyond dispute that on that night Lena and her mistress went to the little garden behind Notre Dame, and Lena, almost in the presence of Vizard, shot Violette dead. The cunning manner in which I was entrapped there shows plainly that this man anticipated some tragic occurrence; but whether the crime was the result of a quarrel between the two women, or whether it had been carefully planned by Vizard, whose accomplice this woman became, can only be explained by her herself.'

'Yes,' gasped Lena, in a strange, hollow voice, her eyes glaring round wildly. 'It is useless to disguise the truth, now that you know everything. I killed her! I — I shot her, because I was jealous of her. A man whom I thought loved me had paid her attention, and I took her there that night and deliberately shot her, as we sat side by side, holding the pistol close to her breast. Sir Douglas must have followed us there, or it seems that he came to keep the appointment he had made with this woman who has now denounced me. At any rate, he saw me commit the crime, and in order to save me, on the spur of the moment, fastened the guilt upon her. He had no hand in

the affair, I swear. It was I who killed her, because I hated her. I left Paris next day, and returned to London. I had only been absent from home three weeks, and, as my mother thought I had been visiting friends in the country, I did not undeceive her. She never knew that I had gone into service as a lady's-maid. I believed myself safe, and returned to the theatre; for only the murdered girl's step-father knew the secret, and he had a strong motive in preserving silence. I never dreamed that a second person was witness of my crime. Ah! it is all terrible, terrible! Here, just when I believed it all forgotten, my crime is revived in every vivid detail, and I am branded as a murderess. That moment of mad, impetuous passion lives in my memory now; how, deliberately I directed her attention away from me, and, placing the revolver at her heart, fired ere she could rise or divine my intention. Ah!' she screamed in a shrill voice; 'ah! the truth is out! I killed her, because she had taken from me the man I loved, and now you will take me from the man I love. You will send me to prison — to the scaffold! No; I — I can't bear it. It's horrible. Let me go. Open the door, and let me go forth from here. Have pity — have mercy — Bertram!' she screamed, holding forth her hands to her husband imploringly. 'Have mercy, Bertram!'

But he turned from her with repugnance, drawing back lest she should touch him, while Vizard stood, white and breathless, utterly unable to articulate a single word in defence.

These revelations had shattered all his self-possession at a single blow.

'You have confessed,' Fosca said, addressing the guilty woman trembling before her. 'For to-day, it is sufficient. The mystery which caused so much sensation in Paris is solved, and I have made explanation of the secret which

bound me to silence. Your own conscience will punish you sufficiently for the evil you have wrought — and after that the French police will demand your extradition.'

Then, turning to the two men standing together, she added, 'Come, let us leave them. To remain here longer is useless, now that the mystery is elucidated and this woman has confessed her crime.'

'Bertram,' wailed his wife, in a hoarse, trembling voice. 'Will you not forgive?' and once again she threw herself before him.

'Never!' her husband answered firmly, and, as the artist unlocked the door, they all three passed out without further word, leaving the wretched, hysterical woman still upon her knees, blanched and ghastly, in an attitude of supplication.

When they had gone, she gave one piercing shriek, which sounded through the house, and with outstretched hands, fell forward upon her face, where she lay, white and motionless, as one dead.

CONCLUSION

LATE that same night, as Bertram Rosmead sat pondering deeply in the smoking-room at Morley's Hotel, a note was brought him by a waiter. He opened it, and found a single hurried line from Vizard, in response to which, after a few moments' hesitation, he took a cab and drove to Staple Inn. He ascended the creaking wooden stairs, and, on gaining the top, was surprised to find the door of the chambers ajar. He pushed it open and entered the untidy sitting-room, but there was no one there. All was silent. He called out, but there was no response. Amazed at finding the place deserted, he pushed open the door of the bedroom and entered. The gas was turned very low, and at first he could distinguish nothing; but an instant later, when his eyes were accustomed to the dim light, he discovered Lena lying half-dressed upon the bed.

He turned up the gas, and approached her. Her eyes were wide open, staring at him with a wild, terrified look, but they were fixed and glazed. He touched her cheek. It was icy cold. She had been dead several hours.

The small, stuffy room reeked of spirits. Upon the floor beside her lay a brandy bottle, where it had fallen from the thin, nervous hand that death had relaxed.

It told its own tale.

Bertram Rosmead removed his hat, and, with head bent, murmured a fervent prayer. He had thought himself utterly lost and fallen to the depths, and lo! he was in the hollow of the hand of God. A few moments later he slowly stooped until his lips kissed the cold, dead face.

Then he turned and went forth a changed man.

Far up in the purple Apennines at that handsome white villa, with its green sun-shutters, which stands back from the dusty high road, winding through the Baths of Lucca, Bertram and Fosca, now man and wife, live happily through the sunny days of the Tuscan summer. The beautiful home was given to Fosca by the Marquis on her marriage, and Bertram has found it an ideal spot for a literary man. Each May they come to London, for the novelist is compelled to see Mr. Howden sometimes, and likes to spend a few happy evenings dining and chatting business with his publisher. When winter comes, however, and snow and rain render life no longer pleasant in that tiny, remote mountain resort, they move down to Florence, where they are well-known in that rather exclusive, if impecunious, set which calls itself society. But Bertram always declares that nowadays he can only work at home, and is always eager to get back to his cosy, book-lined den, overlooking one of the most picturesque valleys in Italy.

Of Vizard nothing has since been heard, except that a warrant was granted at Bow Street a few days after Lena's death for his arrest in connection with some fraudulent company-promoting. Teddy O'Donovan, in the everness of bachelorhood, still enjoys his Saturday house-dinners at the 'Savage.' Once every year he visits the novelist and his wife in their mountain home, and on such occasions the Marquis, whose fame is still world-wide, comes over from his villa near Bologna, to join the merry circle, where the talk so often runs upon the old days in Paris when Fosca sold lace at the Louvre, Bertram was often compelled to eat a handful of hot chestnuts in lieu of dinner, and the seedy, indigent composer of 'Il Parpaglione' had a mania for borrowing thirty centimes. The reason of Jean's sus-

picion of Fosca's complicity in the crime of the Rue du Cloître is often discussed, and according to Jean's own statement, it seems that it was owing to some disparaging remarks which she had made a few days before regarding O'Donovan's mysterious love. This, combined with the fact that he overheard high words between two women at the moment of the crime, and one of the voices he recognised as that of Lena, while a few seconds later he saw her with a revolver in her hand, filled him with suspicion so deep-rooted that he deemed it best to preserve silence.

It was only when he accidentally met Fosca, and she herself recalled the memory of that fateful evening, that her fearlessness of speech and openness of manner convinced him of her innocence. Then he told all he knew, and revealed the identity of the assassin. Thus was solved one of the most curious mysteries which ever puzzled M. Goron and his lieutenants.

In their peaceful lives Bertram and Fosca are nowadays careless of everything, so supremely happy are they in each other's love. To the English-speaking world the name of Bertram Rosmead, novelist, is well-known, for he has now risen to the very first rank of writers of fiction, and his books consequently sell by thousands. Many are the inducements to a man so popular to go back and live in England, but he is entirely without egotism, and, loving the quietness of his home, he always declares that only as a visitor will he ever return to literary London, that curious little circle where Bohemian good-fellowship is so strangely intermingled with paltry jealousy, affectation, and conceit; that life which for him possesses so many bitter memories, the world of Scribes and Pharisees.

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